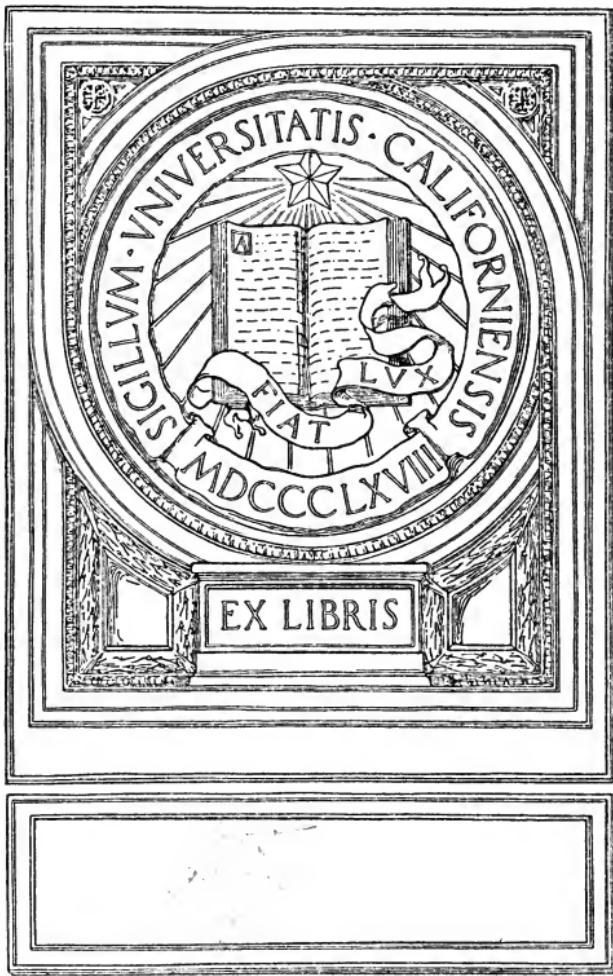
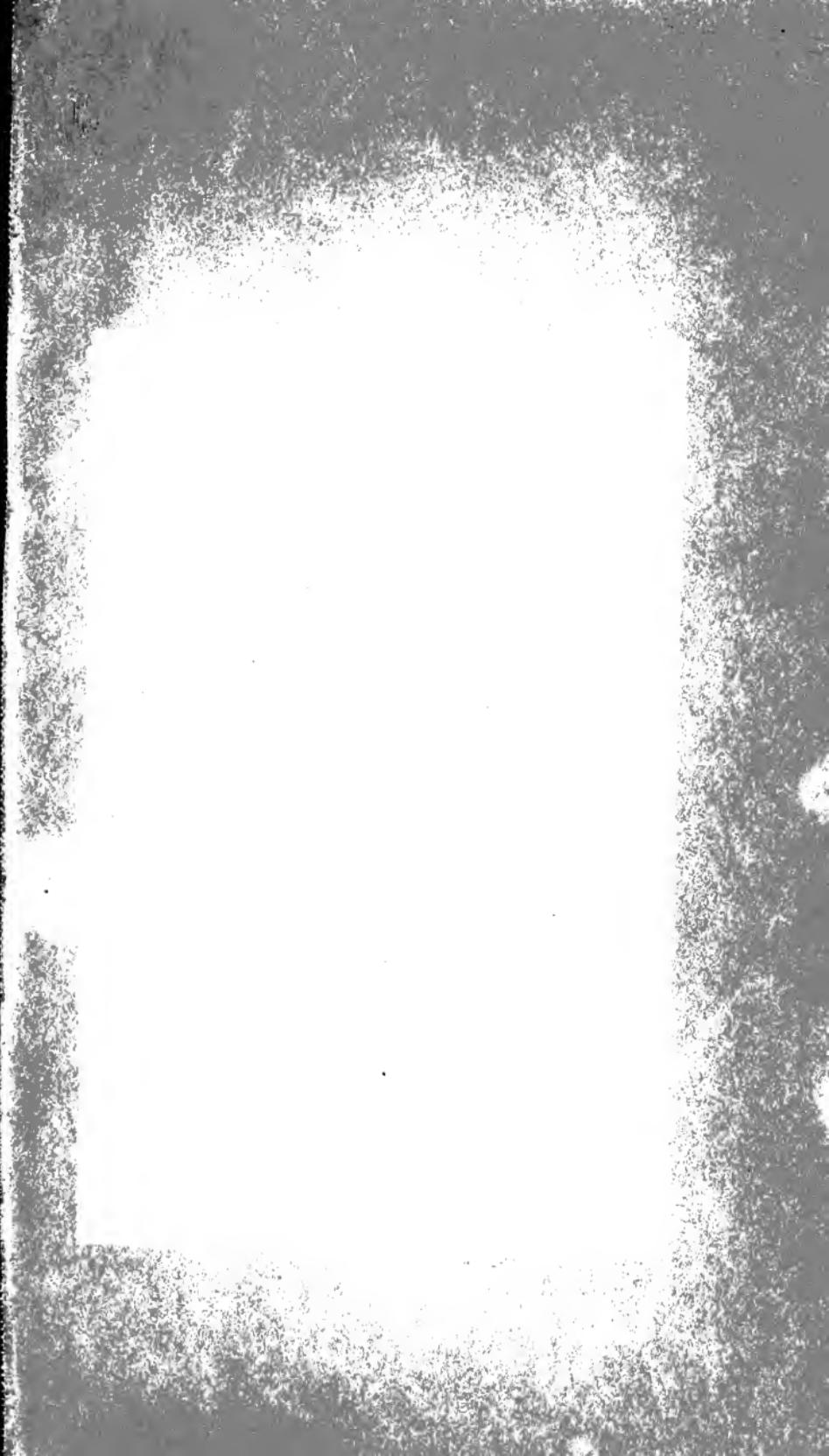


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J. K. Genendalyn Bridges

THORNS AND

ORANGE BLOSSOMS

BY

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THORNS AND ORANGE-BLOSSOMS.

CHAPTER I.

"*'JUNE's palace paved with gold!'*" quoted Lord Ryvers, as he looked down a long woodland glade, where shafts of golden light pierced the thick foliage of the stately trees, and lay with the dancing shadows on the grass. "It is indeed paved with gold," he added. "What colors of mine, what color mixed by mortal hand, could copy the tender green of the young grass, the lovely tints of the trees, the golden gleam of the sun?"

Randolph, Lord Ryvers, patrician by birth and master of half a dozen fair estates, but an artist by nature, delighted in freeing himself from the trammels of society, and taking an artistic tour, without valet or servant, without any of what he called the incumbrances of rank. Having heard one day that no shire in England was so well wooded as Warwickshire, that for the beauty of its rivers, its shaded walks and drives, the county of "Earl Guy" had no equal, he was not happy until he had told his mother, Lady Ryvers, that he was going on a sketching-tour, and had left the great city behind him.

He had seen the loveliest spots in Warwickshire; he had visited the grand old castle; he had studied the loveliness of Stoneleigh Abbey and of Guy's Cliff; he had reveled in the grand ruins of Kenilworth; he had admired the green woods, the brimming rivers, the deep, clear meres; and at last he had reached the picturesque village of St. Byno's, where the quiet, pastoral loveliness for which the county is famous is seen to perfection.

Every artist knows St. Byno's. It is a sleepy village, with a placid stream running through it, and deep, green woods surrounding it on every side; its cottages are half hidden by noble chestnut-trees with green fields around them, where the cattle stand lazily knee-deep in the clear pools.

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There the young artist had tarried. He was delighted with St. Byno's, with the magnificence of its trees, the beauty of its streams. On this particular morning, the second of June, he had gone to sketch in the woods. He placed his easel at the opening of a glade, and the first words that came to his lips were—"June's palace paved with gold!" Lover of art, of nature, of beauty as he was, he stood silently before the glorious contrast of sunlight and shadow, the ripple of green foliage tinged with gold, which met his eyes.

Suddenly, as he watched the light that gleamed, quivered, and fell in golden glory, he caught sight of a pale-blue dress between the trees. He took up the brushes and worked for a few minutes; then, on looking up, he was astonished to find two beautiful eyes fixed on him, and a sweet voice said :

"Is that a real picture? May I look at it?"

"It can hardly be called a picture yet," he answered, raising his hat courteously; "it is but the commencement of one. I find I cannot paint the sunlight as it falls yonder."

"May I look at it more closely?" she asked.

He moved aside, and, placing herself before the easel, she glanced at the still wet colors.

"No," she said, "you have not caught the sunlight."

As he gazed at her, standing in the bright June sunshine, Randolph, Lord Ryvers, met his fate. He turned his eyes with difficulty from the fair young face.

She was a tall, slender girl, with a lithe, graceful figure, golden hair, and a face more beautiful than words can tell—fair and dainty, of the most delicate style of loveliness, with a broad, low brow and eyes of clearest, darkest violet, that were almost black under the dark-fringed lashes. The little white hands were ungloved, the white hat had for all ornament a bunch of corn-flowers, the dress was of plainest material, yet he could have knelt at her feet and paid her homage, as to a queen.

"No," she repeated, "you have not caught the sunlight. Your light is too opaque—it wants transparency. It is yellow, and the sunlight is a faint amber."

"Thanks for your criticism," he said.

"You are very welcome," she replied; and the bewitching violet eyes looked frankly into his. "Many artists

come here to sketch and paint the river and the woods, but none of them catch the true color of the sunlight."

" You are a severe critic," said the young artist.

" I have not the least idea of criticism," she replied—" I know nothing of art-terms ; but I can tell when nature is truthfully imitated and when it is not. The chief character of the sunlight is its transparency."

The young artist bowed.

" I should like to ask you for a few lessons," he said ; and her musical laughter rang through the trees.

" Ask me ? Why, I have never had a lesson in my life ; so I could scarcely undertake to give one," she replied.

He scarcely knew how to address her. He would have liked to tell her how fair a picture she made, to ask her to stand while he sketched her ; but he felt dazed by her beauty and the light of her wonderful eyes.

" I have been very abrupt in my remarks," she said, with a smile. " You must please forgive me. Every summer artists come hither, and my only recreation is in watching their pictures."

His face flushed. This was the very opening he had desired.

" May I hope—may I beg," he said, " that you will sometimes honor me by looking at mine ? "

" If I am passing by," she replied, with queenly indifference.

" You came purposely to look at those pictures you were speaking of, did you not ? " he asked.

" Yes," she replied.

" I wish, then," he said, " you would favor me by coming purposely to look at mine."

She laughed again, and the nonchalance of her laughter piqued him. With one bright glance she seemed to take in every detail of his face and figure.

" Those other artists were not like you," she said.

" Tell me in what way they differed from me," he requested.

" They were old men. One of them had flowing white hair, and you——"

" I am young," he said, " thank Heaven ! Nevertheless you might take an interest in my success, just as you did in theirs."

" Certainly I might," she replied ; and then she looked

at him with frankly smiling eyes. "I believe," she said, "that you are almost the first young man to whom I have ever spoken. There are no young men in St. Byno's."

"I feel myself greatly honored," returned the young lord. "But what a strange place St. Byno's must be!"

"It is the loveliest spot in the whole wide world," said the girl, proudly, "and the people here seem to me to live almost forever. The vicar and the lawyer must be sixty; and the doctor is a white-haired old man."

"What becomes of the young men?" asked the artist.

"They never settle down here," she replied. "They go away to the large towns, as a rule, when they are boys. Sometimes," she added, with unconscious pathos, "they come home to the village; but they soon go back to the busy world. However, some of us never go away"—with a plaintive little sigh.

"It is an old-fashioned spot," he said, musingly. "There are a few such left. I like the place and the name—St. Byno's. It gives one the idea of woodbine stretching along the hedges."

"St. Byno's abounds with woodbine during the month of July," she said; and her heart warmed to him because he praised the home she loved. "I am glad you like the village. I am always grieved when I hear people say that it is dull and tame. What place could be tame with such a view as this?"

"You know the neighborhood well?" he interrogated.

"Yes," she answered—"every hill and valley, every lovely picturesque nook and corner."

"Then," he said, with grave courtesy, "perhaps you will tell me where I shall find the prettiest scenes?"

"If I may," she returned, suddenly remembering that he was a stranger, and that she knew nothing of him.

"Whose permission must you ask?" he said.

"My aunt's," she replied.

"May I ask," he said, standing bareheaded before her, "to whom I have the pleasure of speaking? You probably live somewhere near; and, as I am staying here for some little time, I should feel greatly honored by an introduction to you."

A flush came over the exquisite face.

"My name is Violet," she said, with sweet, shy grace—"Violet Beaton."

"And you live here at St. Byno's?"

She turned and pointed to the left, where, through an opening in the trees, he caught a glimpse of a little cottage built of white stone and covered with climbing roses.

"Do you see the little house there amongst the trees?" she asked. "It is called Acacia Cottage, from the fine acacia-trees that grow round it. My aunt, Miss Alice Atherton, lives there, and I live with her."

"Have you no parents living?" he asked.

"No. I was telling you how long people live at St. Byno's; my parents were exceptions to the rule. My father died when I was ten years old, and my mother soon followed him, heart-broken. I have lived with my aunt ever since."

The beautiful head drooped, the musical voice faltered.

"If you are not busy, do stay for a few minutes," the young artist said, eagerly. "It is so beautiful here this bright June morning."

A fallen tree lay near her, and Violet Beaton sat down upon it.

"I ought not to stay," she said; "my aunt will be angry at my long absence from home."

"I should not think any one would ever be angry with you," he remarked.

"You do not know my aunt," she said, laughing gayly. "She entertains some rather strong prejudices, and, above all things, she dislikes young men."

"She must be a somewhat formidable person," observed the artist.

"She is—and yet she is not," Violet said, growing suddenly grave and thoughtful. "I am so deeply indebted to her that I ought not to speak one word against her. She does not understand youth or happiness. She has but one aim and end in life, and that is the performance of what she considers to be duty. My aunt is tall and angular. She would not make a good subject for a picture, for there is not a graceful line about her. Neither could you fancy her crying or laughing, or kissing a child, or singing a song. She is always prim and precise. Yet she is good at heart."

"Many strictly good people are very disagreeable," he remarked.

She looked up with an expression of relief.

"Have you found out that?" she inquired. "I am so

glad ; I thought I was quite alone in entertaining such an unorthodox idea. I can just remember how beautiful my father's religion was—all love and charity ; whereas every disagreeable thing my aunt does, every disagreeable word she speaks, is always attributed to her religious views."

"The life must be a dull one for you," he remarked, looking down at her beautiful face.

"It would be," she said, "did I not find so much pleasure in my surroundings."

"You love nature so much ?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied. "I am just eighteen, and I have never been beyond the sound of the rush of the river yet. You see it runs just at the end of the garden ; the acacia-trees grow quite down to the water's edge."

"You have never been away from this place in all your life?" he said, wonderingly.

"No, not for a day," she replied. "Warwick is not very far away ; but I have never even seen the grand old castle there."

"And I," he said, "though I am only a few years older than you are, have been almost all over the world."

"I long to see the world," she confessed, looking at him with a wistful expression. "I love St. Byno's ; but I should not like to spend the whole of my life here. I should like to see the grand places I have read about. But then life is long."

He sighed when he heard the words, for he knew that poets and philosophers said just the opposite. She was young, beautiful, quite innocent and ignorant of the ways of life. He was like a man with a new picture to look at, a new book to read ; he was enraptured and fascinated ; he could have sat on the trunk of the fallen tree and listened to her forever.

"Tell me about yourself," he said.

"I have nothing to tell," she replied. "You can understand how quiet and uneventful my life has been, for I have never left St. Byno's."

"I can understand how pleasant and simple it has been," he said.

"Yes," she answered, a shade of sadness coming over her face. "If my parents had lived, it would have been all that is most delightful. But my aunt has no sympathy with the young, neither has she any love for the beautiful,

and consequently she is apt to regard me and my amusements with contempt. She—— Well, I cannot well explain myself; but I am not very happy with her."

There was something of repressed feeling in the girlish face which touched the listener.

"My aunt," she continued, "does not even like the singing of the birds. She destroys the butterflies, but she lets the bees live, because they make honey, which she sells. Every one is eager to buy it; they say it is the finest honey in Warwickshire. Things that are beautiful and of use she tolerates; but, be they ever so beautiful and useless, she dislikes them."

"Under what category does she place you?" he asked.

"Under neither," was the reply. "In Aunt Alice's mind I hold a position quite different from anything else in creation. She often says that I was born for her especial annoyance, to be her especial cross; and, though she is very kind to me in essential things, I believe it is true that I am a torment to her."

"Why," he asked, slowly. "Tell me why."

"Because I cannot fall in completely with all her views. She would like me to get up at a certain hour in the morning. If the sun is shining I rise very early—I cannot wait for the regulation hour; and then my aunt is not pleased. She says that the dew destroys my shoes and dresses, that I should wait until 'the day is aired'; and, when I attempt to argue the point with her, she grows angry. Do you see where the water falls over the rock there and runs back into the stream?" the girl asked, after a brief pause.

"Yes; I see," he replied. "How musical the sound of falling water is!"

"In the moonlight that fall makes a beautiful picture, and I often come here to look at it. I sometimes think it was through just such a wood as this that poor Queen Guinevere rode with the handsome knight by her side; but my aunt says that all fancies are ridiculous, and that we ought to think only of what is real."

"This world is beautiful enough," he said; "but I almost think the world of fancy is more beautiful still."

Violet gave a quick, glad smile. It was so delightful to have some tastes in common.

By this time Randolph, Lord Ryvers, had completely lost his heart. He thought that this was the most natural

beautiful, graceful girl he had ever seen, and that she completely outshone all the great ladies of his acquaintance. His heart beat fast as he looked at her.

But there was no thought of love in Violet Beaton's mind or heart. She had an idea that she was not acting in the most prudent manner possible, though it was delightful to talk to some one who was young like herself. Presently a change came over her exquisite face—a shadow fell upon it.

"I understand," she said, "what it is to lead a life of repression. I have little time to myself; and everything I like best I have to deny myself. In our house everything goes on like machinery; we do the same thing everyday at the same time. I do not remember the least variety or any break in the monotony for years."

"And you have never been from St. Byno's in your life?" he repeated.

It seemed to him a most extraordinary thing to have lived always in the same place.

"My mind and heart and brain travel," she said. "There will come a change into my life some day. I have often thought about the time when I shall go out into the great world;" and the beautiful eyes looked as though they would fain pierce the mists which obscured the future.

Lord Ryvers was at a loss what to say to her; yet he was afraid to remain silent, lest she should declare that it was time to go.

"Did they call you 'Violet' because of the color of your eyes?" he asked.

"No," she laughed; "my mother gave me the name because she was particularly fond of violets. All my offenses in my aunt's eyes, are summed up in that name, 'Violet.'"

"Do you know the poem of the 'Queen's Marys'?" asked Lord Ryvers. "Your name reminds me of it. It begins—

"There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael, and me."

Are you descended from those same Beatons?"

"I should think not; I should hope not," she replied.

"Hope not! Why?" he asked.

She looked round at him with impatient scorn, her face flushed, her eyes shining.

"I have strong likes and strong dislikes," she replied; "but, if there is one thing I dislike more than another, it is what you call—you people who live in the outer world, I mean—the aristocracy."

He shrunk back as though she had struck him.

"What an extraordinary thing!" he said. "Why should you hate them? What have the aristocracy done to you?"

"Nothing to me," she answered. "But during the winter nights, while Aunt Alice and I sit sewing, she tells me stories of the aristocracy. Aunt Alice has seen a great deal of life, and she retails her experience for my benefit."

"I think the—the aristocracy quite as good as their neighbors," he said.

"That is because you do not know them," she remarked, laughing triumphantly. "You have lived your life amongst the beauties of art and nature. What should you know of the follies, the sins, the idle, useless, frivolous lives of aristocrats?"

"Why, I belong to them!" he was about to say, when he suddenly remembered that it would be very bad policy on his part to tell her that he was an aristocrat, seeing that she had openly proclaimed her dislike of them. So he answered, quietly, "If you will teach me, I will dislike them also."

"Dislike comes by instinct, not by training or teaching," she remarked; and then she added, hurriedly, "I must go;" and Lord Ryvers felt all at once a new and strange feeling of desolation.

"I must go," repeated Violet Beaton. "This is just the time that Aunt Alice takes a solemn promenade round the flower-garden. I carry the basket, whilst she cuts the dead leaves from their stalks and otherwise does a little amateur gardening."

"You will let me see you again," Lord Ryvers urged; "you will not refuse?"

"I pass by here often," she answered, "and I shall be glad to see how your picture progresses. If I were in your place, I should devote the morning to getting that sunshine right."

He thought to himself that this the most eventful morning of his life would be spent in dreams of her.

"I am very unwilling to say good morning, Miss Beaton."

but I say it, hoping that I may enjoy the happiness of renewing our acquaintance to-morrow."

"I have been happy too," she said; but there was no confusion or embarrassment in her manner. "It is pleasant talking to people of one's own age; they have so much more sympathy than one's elders. I have told you my name," she added, suddenly; "if I want to think of your picture and of you, by what name must I remember you?"

After her unexpected denunciation of aristocrats, he dared not tell his name and title, lest she should avoid him in the future.

"My name is Randolph," he answered.

"Good morning then, Mr. Randolph," she said, with a bright smile. "Now I go to receive the reprimand of a justly angered aunt."

He watched the pale blue dress as it disappeared amongst the trees.

"To think that I should meet my fate here, on a bright June morning!" he said to himself. "Yet love and June and roses seem naturally to go together."

He watched until the last vestige of the blue dress vanished, then he began to blame himself. Why had he not said more to her? Why had he not dared tell her the first time he saw her how well and how dearly he loved her? And, at least, if he had not gone so far as that, he might have asked her to make an appointment with him. What if she had gone out of his life, and he should never see her again? How foolish he had been to let her go? The only thing left for him was to be sure to be here on the morrow. As for the future, he did not even care to think of it. He would leave the painting until another day, when he should be less haunted by that exquisite face. What was the beauty of sunshine and leaf to him, whose mind was filled with a far lovelier vision?

"I have often wondered whom I should love, where I should see her first, in what guise she would come to me, and how fair she would be," he thought; "and now my questions are all answered at once. I have met her in the grand old woods of St. Byno's on the brightest day in the year; and she has come to me in the fairest guise, for she has the loveliest face I have ever seen. How I wish she could have stayed with me a few hours!"

And then he closed the easel and walked down the glade,

the words of a quaint old ballad rising to his lips the while. He trolled them out in a deep, clear voice, and seemed to derive wonderful satisfaction from them.

“ Wrong not, sweet mistress of my heart,

The merit of true passion

With thinking that he feels no smart

That sues for no compassion.

“ Silence in love betrays more woe

Than words, though ne'er so witty;

A beggar that is dumb, you know,

May challenge double pity.

“ Then wrong not, dearest to my heart,

My love for secret passion;

He smartest most who hides his smart

And sues for no compassion.”

Lord Ryvers said to himself that some day, when they were alone in this woodland glade, he would sing that ballad for her. It said more than he could say, for it told of the silent struggle of deep love to make itself understood. The only cloud that overshadowed this the fairest dawn of love was that Violet Beaton disliked aristocrats. He would have to combat that dislike, and make her own that an aristocrat was as good as a commoner.

Meanwhile the object of his dreams hastened through the woods, crossed the pretty rustic bridge that spanned the river, opened the garden gate, and looked up with laughing eyes at the tall, erect figure awaiting her there.

“ Violet,” said stern Miss Atherton, “ you know that I attend to the garden every day at twelve o’clock ; it is now half an hour behind the appointed time. Where have you been ? ”

The recollection of where she had been, and with whom, and what her aunt would say, if she knew it, brightened the laughing eyes.

“ I have been in the woods, Aunt Alice. I know that I am late, and I am sorry for it. I will make up for it by working doubly hard now.”

Miss Atherton was somewhat mollified, and she said, more gently :

“ I will overlook it this once, but it must not happen again ; duties must be performed first, pleasure is an after-consideration.”

So Violet Beaton took the basket obediently, and attended her aunt in her gardening operations. Miss Atherton was as scrupulous in her garden as in her house; no weeds, no dead leaves, no dying flowers were permitted there.

She was in an unusually vigorous mood this morning; the scissors were in use constantly, and blossom after blossom fell—for she had a great dislike to what she called the untidiness of dying flowers.

"That rose would have lasted another week, aunt," Violet protested, as she watched Miss Atherton snip off a fine damask rose which was a little faded.

"You are here to carry the basket, not to make comments," was Miss Atherton's curt reply.

Violet's thoughts went back to an incident in her childhood. Miss Atherton had given orders to have the grass on the little lawn mown. It was studded with white daisies that had been the very pride and delight of the child's heart—wide-open daisies with golden eyes; and, when she saw them cut down by the scythe, she cried bitterly. Miss Atherton was exasperated. It was bad enough to have a niece; it was worse still to have a niece given to sentimentality.

From that day, when Violet half broke her heart over the dead daisies, Miss Atherton had done all in her power to repress the girl's imagination instead of training it; and the consequence was that it grew under this repression, and not in the healthiest fashion. It expended itself on idealizing the beautiful things around her. Strangely enough, however, Violet's thoughts had never wandered to the subject of love. She did not sit by the river, as some girls would have done, and dream of a possible lover, the reason being that she had no young-girl friends, that she had read no love-stories, and very little poetry of a sentimental kind. She reveled in the pleasures of imagination, she peopled the woods and the glades, she saw what was invisible to other eyes; but her thoughts had not yet wandered to the subject of love.

Miss Atherton was *passée* now, but long years before she had had her romance; she remembered even now the pleasure and the pain of it. The same pain, she was determined, should never pierce the heart of her niece. Therefore she carefully selected her friends and supervised the books that

she read and the pictures she saw ; and Violet, at eighteen years of age, was frank, simple, and innocent as a child.

No one ever knew the details of Miss Atherton's love-story. She had been handsome, once upon a time, with a proud, stately beauty. It was faded now ; pain had left great lines on her face, had blanched her hair, had taken the light from her eyes, and left her bitter, cold, and proud. It was generally believed that her great enmity to the aristocracy arose from the fact that she had been cruelly deceived by one of their number. This was actually the truth. Miss Atherton had formerly lived as English governess in a family of high position in Rome. An English nobleman visiting there fell in love with her, and for more than seven years kept up a constant correspondence with her, always promising that he would make her his wife when his father died. When that time came, however, he married a beautiful young heiress, and Miss Atherton found that she had wasted her life, youth, and beauty on a dream. It was this remembrance which made her so bitter as she walked amongst the roses. She had tried to teach her niece two things : one was to detest the aristocracy of all nations, the other was to live without love.

CHAPTER II.

VIOLET BEATON'S story of her life was very simple. Dr. Beaton had settled down in the little village of St. Byno's, hoping to do as most other people did there—enjoy a long life. He married Mary Atherton, whose sister had just come home from Paris, and had taken up her abode in the pretty, solitary house known as Acacia Cottage.

The doctor and his wife had lived very happily ; they had had but this one child, Violet. To the regret of all who knew him, the doctor died suddenly of a fever, caught from a poor woman whom he was attending. His young wife did not long survive him.

In these circumstances, Miss Atherton could hardly do less than adopt Violet, for, so far as she knew, Dr. Beaton had no relatives living, excepting a younger brother who had gone many years before to America. Miss Atherton had an income of just one hundred pounds per annum, and, by dint of practicing the greatest care and economy, she had been able to provide her niece with a home.

It was a picturesque cottage, with beautiful and picturesque surroundings ; yet Violet Beaton had not a happy life with the stern, grim lady who had forgotten what youth and beauty and love were like.

"I was handsome once," she said one day, when she found Violet standing before a mirror admiring the shining splendor of her own hair, "and you see what it has come to."

"I should like to be handsome, too, aunt," remarked the girl.

"It would make little difference in the end if you were," said Miss Atherton, grimly ; and Violet, glancing at her aunt, shuddered.

Would her own shining, rippling hair, that was like a veil of pure gold, grow white and thin ? Would those beautiful white shoulders become lean and angular, that exquisite face wrinkled and lined ?

"I should like best to die young," she thought ; "I should not like to grow old and bitter, proud and cold, like my aunt."

Everything that had once been a sort of sweetness in Alice Atherton's life had changed to bitterness now. In that happy long ago, when she had been young and beautiful, and had waited patiently for her happiness, she had loved poetry, music, romance—all that was fair and bright on earth ; now, because they had been part and parcel of that old time she hated them. As her niece grew more lovely, more imaginative every day, she grew more grim and stern ; yet she taught Violet to speak French, and she trained the magnificent contralto voice to perfection.

Miss Atherton had other peculiarities. She had lived many years in France, and had her own opinion of the terrible revolution there. Her sympathies by no means went with the fair-haired aristocrats, who mounted the scaffold with a smile, and so defeated the last would-be triumph of their foes ; they were rather with the people who groaned and suffered and toiled and died. She had a most appalling collection of stories, of which the heroes were always aristocrats and villains of the most atrocious kind.

Violet was young and very impressible. On this, the one subject on which Miss Atherton was eloquent, she felt most deeply, and agreed with her.

There was a singular dearth of young people at St. By-

no's; the place was so small. What Violet said was true—she had never talked to a young man. The doctor who had succeeded to her father's practice was old; he had a young son, whom Violet had seen, but to whom she had never spoken. He was the only young man belonging to what Miss Atherton called their class; of the class below her she never thought. There had been no break in the monotony of Violet's life. She had had no holidays, had paid no visits, had made no friends. The hour she had spent in the bonny woods of St. Byno's was the happiest in her life. She had a feeling that she ought to tell her aunt of the new acquaintance she had made; but she knew perfectly well that, if she did so, she would never be allowed to see the young artist or his picture again. So she decided upon not saying anything to her aunt about it. He would be gone in a few days, and there the matter would end.

"Violet," broke in the stern voice of Miss Atherton, "look where you are going; you almost fell over the stones! You are in dreamland; and, as that is a very bad habit of yours, I should much like to know of what you are thinking."

The knowledge that for the first time in her life she was thinking of a man who was both young and handsome brought a hot flush to the girl's face.

Miss Atherton saw it and stood before her, an accusing judge.

"You have some kind of nonsense in your mind, child," she declared.

"I fear that is often the case, auntie," her niece replied, calmly.

"Remember," said Miss Atherton, raising her forefinger, "there are five pairs of stockings to mend, six kitchen towels to make and mark, and a hamper of fruit to pack for Warwick; now I ask, have you any time for nonsense?"

"Not one moment, aunt," she answered, with a merry laugh; but the laugh died away when she entered the house and found the work ready for her.

They must dine first. The clock was striking one, and at the precise moment the little maid appeared, carrying in the dinner; and, when the meal was over, Miss Atherton pointed to a pile of work on a side-table.

"That will occupy you until five o'clock, Violet," she

said; "then in the cool of the evening you can gather the gooseberries."

So saying, Miss Atherton retired, for, as she had often declared, her constitution required an hour's rest after dinner.

Violet took her work to her favorite spot—the bay-window—where she could see the bridge and the river.

It was a struggle to remain within doors. The river had never looked more beautiful. She could see the great masses of foliage and the sunlit glades of St. Byno's woods. How she longed to be out and away.

Later on in the afternoon, while Miss Atherton still slept, and the little maid had gone to a neighboring farm-house, Violet thought she heard footsteps in the front garden. She listened, but all was silent; and, coming to the conclusion that she must be mistaken, she resumed her work. Again she heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps and the click of the little gate near the acacia-trees. This time she went to the door. There was no one there; but on the pretty rustic seat of the porch lay a bouquet of flowers and a basket of fine peaches. On a slip of paper was written, "Sweets to the sweet, flowers to the fair."

Her first impulse was to thank Heaven that her aunt had not seen them. Of course it must be the young artist who had placed them there. What a terrible risk to run! She must hide them, and tell him not to repeat the imprudence.

But that same evening the maid came to her with a letter.

"If you please, miss," she said, "a gentleman asked me to give you this. He gave me a shilling to bring you the letter, and two shillings not to tell your aunt."

The note contained a few hurriedly written lines from the artist, asking her to be so kind as to look at his picture on the morrow. He would be sketching at nine in the morning. She smiled as she read it—for she could not foresee what was to happen in the future, and she was only eighteen.

CHAPTER III.

MISS ATHERTON was particular about rendering Acacia Cottage secure at night. Every door and every window

were fastened punctually at half-past eight; then, having read a chapter in the family Bible to the yawning little maid and her niece, she dismissed them; and she herself also retired to rest, with the virtuous sensation of having fulfilled her duty to the uttermost.

Violet went to her room, and, having extinguished her candle, drew up her blind, opened the window, and let in a flood of silvery moonlight. The girl's poetical soul was roused almost to rapture. She could hear the river as it rippled between the green banks; and then, in the far distance, the nightingale began to sing.

"I should like to hear it more distinctly," she said. "My aunt could not be very angry if she did know that I went out to listen to the nightingale's song."

It was still quite early, and the dying light of day was giving place to the pale light of the moon. She had no thought in her nature-loving heart save that of seeing the fall of the waters and listening to the nightingale.

Little imagining how beautiful she looked, quite unconscious that she was committing a great imprudence, Violet wrapped a black-lace shawl round her head and shoulders, and crept noiselessly down stairs. Then she passed into the dining-room, and, unfastening the long window, stepped on to the lawn.

A sense of freedom and exhilaration made her pulses thrill. All around was so fair and so lovely to her dazzled senses.

"How beautiful!" she cried to herself. "I will go to the river first."

It did not take her many minutes to reach her favorite spot, the falls. The spray shone like diamonds; all kinds of sweet, wild, vagrant thoughts flitted through her mind. And then, as she stood there, a tall, dark figure emerged from under the great group of trees near the waterfall. She recognized it at a glance, and her first impulse was to turn and fly; yet why, she asked herself, should she not hear the nightingale sing, if she chose to do so?

He advanced a few steps.

"Do forgive me," he said, "for being here. I fought with the temptation for five long hours, and I lost in the end."

"What was the temptation?" she asked. "I do not understand."

" You said this morning—oh, how long it seems since then!—that you liked to see the waterfall by moonlight. I looked at the almanac, and found that there was a full moon to-night; and I have been debating in my own mind whether I should come or not. It seemed unfair to take any advantage of what you said unconsciously; but I longed to see you again."

" Did you? " she asked. " Did you really wish to see me? How strange! "

" It is not strange at all! " he cried, impetuously, making one step in advance, and then checking himself. " I thought you would come out to-night; and, now that I am here, do be kind to me, Miss Beaton, and let me talk to you for a few minutes."

" It is not at all the right thing to do," she answered. " To tell you the truth, Mr. Randolph," she said, " I came out to hear the nightingale sing; it is in the linden-tree over there."

" May I go with you so far? " he asked. " It would be an untold pleasure to me."

She looked at him intently.

" Aunt Alice will—well, she will be terribly angry with me if ever she knows it; but it will not always be June, and the nightingale will not always sing. Yes, we will go and hear it."

The dew lay thick and heavy on the grass; each drop seemed to catch the moonlight. Lord Ryvers was beside himself with delight; his heart was full, but he could not speak, the words would not come. The song of the nightingale grew clearer and sweeter.

" There is the linden-tree," said Violet; " we must move very quietly, or we shall disturb the bird."

With quiet steps on the long grass, they advanced until they reached the spot where the bird was pouring out its marvelous flow of melody. She stood entranced.

" I am glad I came," said Violet, after a time. " I would not have missed it for the whole world."

" I might have lived forever in the busy haunts of men," remarked Lord Ryvers, " and have heard nothing like it."

" If we never meet again," she said, regarding him thoughtfully, " how strange it will seem to remember that we have spent an hour together in this fashion!"

There was not the least consciousness on her fair young face as she spoke.

"If I thought we were never to meet again," he declared, hurriedly, "I should not care to live another hour."

"That is the language of poets," she said, laughing. "I wonder, if the nightingale's song were put into words, what it would all be about?"

"Love," he answered, curtly.

"Love!" said Violet. "I should think it would be something more interesting than that."

"More interesting?" he asked, not quite sure if he heard rightly.

"Oh, yes," she said, "much more interesting! I should imagine that birds sing of new themes; love is as old as creation."

Just then the nightingale finished its song—long beautiful notes that seemed to die away over the trees; then all was still.

"Do you remember what Barry Cornwall says?" asked Lord Ryvers. "I think the idea is beautiful—

"Music leaves
Her soul upon the silence, and our hearts.
Hear and forever hoard those golden sounds,
And reproduce them, sweet, in after-hours."

"You like quoting poetry," she said.

"A night like this is in itself a poem," he answered. "I shall take away with me a confused dream of moonlight in June, of the waterfall, of the nightingale—"

"And of me," she interrupted, with a bright laugh. "Shall you forget me?"

"You will be the centre of the poem," he replied, with a bow, "the very soul of it. I shall never forget you. If you should be passing through the wood to-morrow, will you look at my picture?"

"Have you been working at it to-day?" she asked.

"No; my mind has been filled, possessed by another picture," he said; "but I shall work at it to-morrow."

"You want my aunt Alice to keep you at work," she remarked. "And now, Mr. Randolph, good-night. I am afraid this is a terrible indiscretion. We must never repeat it."

He did not tell her that that one half-hour had been to him as a dream of Paradise.

CHAPTER IV.

"THEN you would not marry an aristocrat, Miss Beaton?" asked the young artist.

"I? No—a thousand times no! I am not sure that I should care to marry at all; but an aristocrat—never! If I loved some young lord so dearly that my heart was breaking with love, I would not marry him."

"There are not many girls who think as you do," said Lord Ryvers, gloomily.

"They have not been so well taught," she replied, with all the rashness of youth and inexperience. "Long years ago, far back in the olden times, when 'aristocracy' meant chivalry, it was a different matter. Aristocrats are not 'knights' in these days. They do not understand what true knighthood means."

"In what do they fall short?" asked Lord Ryvers, looking with admiration at the flushed face and shining eyes.

"The present race are effeminate, luxury-loving, effete, self-indulgent——"

"Stop, Miss Beaton," he said; "assertion is no proof."

"Proof is not wanting," she replied. "My aunt Alice says that honor is dead amongst them—that nothing of it lives but the name, and that is an empty sound. She says—I wonder if I can remember one half?—that names once blazoned high on the roll of the battle-field now serve as examples among card-sharpers. She says that in olden times, when a man of noble birth and ancient title injured the honor of his fellow man, they stood together face to face and fought it out; now they compensate injured honor with money. Aunt Alice says they have lost the respect and loyalty toward women which goes so far in making a man a chevalier and a saint. One now steals another man's wife; a few thousand pounds puts the matter right. The honor of the old days was best, when a man avenged his injuries in the heart's blood of his rival, instead of taking money for them."

"How prejudiced you are!" he said.

"I do not think so. I am emphatically a daughter of the people; I see the wrongs of the people. I asked my

aunt Alice one day if I might read the newspapers. She said, 'No; they are unfit for any modest girl to read; they are full of divorce cases and scandals in high life.' I thought the duty of the aristocracy was to set a good example to the people below them. Do they? Are the men such models of honor, integrity, courage, and truth? Are the women to be reverenced and admired?"

"You must remember," he interrupted, "that your aunt Alice is not infallible. It does not follow that, because she says a thing, it must be true. Now hear me—that is, if you have patience, Miss Beaton. Yours was such a fierce onslaught. Will you listen to me?"

"Certainly," she said. "I should like to hear your opinion on the subject."

"Well, then, I believe that the finest body of men and the best women in the world are to be found amongst the English aristocracy. The men are high-bred, courageous, and honorable; the women, good, refined, and charitable. Who says that honor is dead in the breasts of English gentlemen? I say it lives, and will live forever, just as loyalty, purity, and goodness live in the hearts of the women."

"You know no more of the habits and lives of the aristocracy than I do," she said. "You are a true artist; but you have many very false ideas."

"You think so? Well, I think yours are equally incorrect. You seem to me to be prejudiced, Miss Beaton. In every class of society you will find black sheep. Do you think it is fair to be harder on the aristocrat who cheats at cards or forges his neighbor's name than on the man who kicks his wife to death? Every class has its own peculiar sins."

"You shall defend the aristocracy, if you like," she said, with a smile; "but I shall not like you any the better for it. I hope that all my life long I shall steer clear of them."

"I hope you will not," was the young lord's thought. Aloud he said: "Then, if a scion of nobility came wooing you, Miss Beaton, it would be all in vain?"

"It would indeed," she replied. "Not that any stray duke or earl is likely to make his way to St. Byno's."

"Or even a stray baronet?" he added.

"No; St. Byno's is hardly the place to attract such people. If ever I marry—which is very doubtful—I

should like to marry an honest, industrious man of my own class."

"What do you call your own class, Miss Beaton?" he asked.

"Professional," she replied, carelessly. "My father was a doctor."

"I am exceedingly glad that I am a professional," he rejoined, feeling very much ashamed of his evasion; but he would not risk, by telling her his name and title, the small hope he had of winning the liking of this girl. She would never speak to him again if she knew it. "All is fair in love and war," he said to himself, resolving to win her if he could.

The morning had broken bright and fair, dewy and fragrant. Lord Ryvers was early at the trysting-place. He was uncertain whether she would come or not; but the day would be well spent in waiting for her, should she only pass by. It was nearly noon when she came. She looked at his picture and admired it.

"You are clever," she said to him, briefly. "You will make your way."

"Do you think so?" he asked, his face flushing with delight. "Your words give me encouragement; I should be a true artist if I were much with you."

"You are a true artist in any case," she declared, emphatically.

Lord Ryvers was leaning against the trunk of a silver-beech; Violet sat on a moss-covered stone; and the time was flying as it always did when they were together. She blushed when he spoke of the nightingale.

"I am sure," she said, "that that was a great imprudence on my part. I ought not to have gone out. I shall have a fit of honesty some day, and tell Aunt Alice; then I shall receive the reprimand I feel I deserve."

"I wish I could get to know your aunt," he said. "How could it be managed?"

"Not at all," she answered. "My aunt would rather make friends with a whole tribe of Zulus than with a young Englishman, even though he were an artist."

"Could I ask her to let me sketch the cottage?" he said.

"She would never consent. Besides, why should you wish to know her?"

"Can you ask me that question?"

"Certainly I can. I have a great natural affection for Aunt Alice, because she has been so good to me; but I cannot see why a stranger should wish to know her."

"I will tell you, Miss Beaton, why I wish to know her. I wish to see more of you. If I knew your aunt, I could call at Acacia Cottage every day."

"Even then you would be obliged to leave the neighbourhood when your picture was finished."

He thought to himself that he would not go alone, if prayers and persuasions could induce her to go with him. Randolph, Lord Ryvers, of Ryverswell, had fixed his whole heart on the winning of this girl; he had fallen passionately in love with her. The happiness of his life depended on her; and she not only disliked aristocrats, but gave no sign of being in love with him at all. He could not rouse in her any consciousness of love; her heart slept the calm sleep of childhood, and he could not awaken it. He told her the most pathetic of love-stories; she only laughed lightly and brightly.

"It is all nonsense," she said.

She wondered that an artist, whose mind should be stored with such different things, could think of nonsense. She did not care for love-stories; she did not care for love-poetry; she liked martial ballads. If he recited some of the grand old border ballads for her, she was pleased; she liked the ring and the measure. If he wished to please her, let him leave love alone.

So the days passed on, and the glowing loveliness of June glided into the mature beauty of July. By this time they had become fast friends—that is, Lord Ryvers was so deeply in love with Violet that he could hardly live out of her presence; while she, without being in the least in love with him, looked to him for the happiness and brightness of her life.

So matters might have continued to run on, but that constant security had made the young lord and Violet careless; and, rambling one morning through St. Byno's woods, talking and laughing quite at their ease, Miss Atherton came suddenly upon them. It was a scene never to be forgotten. The three stood still. Miss Atherton's stern face grew more stern; beautiful, laughing Violet looked inclined to cry. Lord Ryvers did not lose his courage,

although he was for a few moments quite at a loss what to say. Miss Atherton drew her tall figure to its utmost height.

There was no escape; they could not pass her by, they could not recede. Why should they? Miss Atherton looked at the girl with the rose-blush on her face, then at the tall, broad-shouldered, stalwart young fellow by her side.

"Who are you?" was the question asked by her uncompromising eyes and her stern face, a question they both felt must be answered.

Lord Ryvers was equal to the situation; he would have gone through fire for the girl by his side. He removed his hat, with a low bow, and, seeing him there with the sun-light on his handsome head and face, his whole bearing indicative of nobility, a woman's heart might have relented to him. Not so Miss Atherton's.

"Who are you?" the stern eyes repeated. He bowed again.

"I have the pleasure," he said, "of speaking to Miss Atherton. I have been several times on the point of calling to ask permission to sketch your beautiful cottage."

"Certainly not, sir," she returned.

But Lord Ryvers was not daunted.

"I think it is the most beautiful spot I have seen," he added.

"May I ask who you are, sir?" she inquired.

"I am an artist, madam. I have been sketching in the woods of St. Byno's. I was fortunate enough to meet your niece, and she has kindly shown me one or two of the most picturesque spots."

"My niece," interrupted the lady, "has done wrong. She had no right to speak to you, a stranger."

"I had a vague idea that it was not quite right," said Violet, with a beautiful blush; "but it was so pleasant to talk to some one young, some one nearly my own age, aunt."

"Young!" repeated Miss Atherton, with great contempt. "What is youth but folly? I wish you good morning, sir. No, I decline to have my cottage sketched. I shall keep my niece indoors for the future."

At these words Violet winced. Lord Ryvers saw that at this present juncture of affairs, it would be useless to

speak. He trusted to the future. He would fain have touched Violet's hand before parting; but with those stern eyes fixed upon him, it was impossible.

"I can only hope," murmured Violet, "that I shall not be buried alive in a brick wall, like the girl in the poem."

As for Miss Atherton, her indignation was too great for words.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Miss Atherton and her niece reached Acacia Cottage, the elder lady stood by while her niece entered. Then slowly and majestically she turned the key in the lock. Violet looked at her.

"Aunt Alice," she said, "you cannot mean what you have said? You cannot seriously intend to lock me in the house?"

"I mean it, Violet. For the future, when you go out, I go with you."

Farewell, then, to the fresh, sweet dewy mornings and pleasant rambles by moonlight to hear the nightingale! Farewell to all the simple pleasures of her young life, if that stern duenna were constantly to be her companion! She stood still and looked into Miss Atherton's face.

"Aunt," she said, simply, "why should you punish me? I have done no wrong, though it is true that I have met this young artist several times. I did not tell you, because I know you dislike young men. But it was pleasant to talk to some one of my own age."

"Your own age," replied Miss Atherton, "is the age of folly."

"I do not deny it; but folly is sometimes sweeter than wisdom. And you are really going to lock me up because I have exchanged a few pleasant words with a pleasant acquaintance, one who will in all probability go away in a few days never to return."

"You know my opinion with regard to young men, and, mind, it is my duty, Violet"—and Miss Atherton looked a little confused. "You do not leave this house again while that person is in the neighborhood, unless I accompany you."

"Aunt Alice," said the girl, calmly, "you may think it

your duty to act as you are doing; but it is one of the unkindest things you ever did in your life."

"I am the best judge of that, Violet," rejoined Miss Atherton, coldly. "You have full liberty to walk in the garden and the orchard, but nowhere else without my permission."

And Miss Atherton, with the virtuous consciousness of one who has done right, retired to her room, leaving her niece to her thoughts. They were not very cheerful ones. Violet almost lived out of doors. What home, parents, friends were to other girls the fields and flowers were to her; and the prospect of having Miss Atherton as her constant companion was not a pleasant one.

If Miss Atherton had not met the young couple, and had not considered it her duty to punish her niece, Violet would not have thought half so much about the young artist. As it was, her thoughts constantly reverted to him. She went over all their discussions and arguments in her mind again and again. She realized that she would never again be happy without a friend of her own age. It was so pleasant to laugh and to talk, to exchange ideas with some one on terms of equality. The intercourse she held with her aunt was too one-sided to be agreeable. Miss Atherton uttered sentiments, and Violet listened to them without even the desire to contradict. But with the young artist it had been quite different. There had been a delightful freedom and gayety about their conversation. She had had a glimpse of joy and delight, of youth and happiness; but now it was past, and she would, in all probability, never look on that handsome young face again. Her heart ached at the thought; yet only yesterday the knowledge that their intimacy must end would not have distressed her in the smallest degree.

"I understand now," said Violet Beaton to herself, "what is meant by 'moral force.' For my aunt to lock the door is all nonsense! I could break it open; I could get out at the windows, or by the side-door, which is not locked; but I feel the moral control; and, because my aunt has forbidden me, I feel that I cannot leave the house."

So, having no other distractions, her thoughts were constantly of the young artist. She had not given many minutes' consideration to his personal appearance before

her friendship with him was tabooed. Now she dwelt on it continually. How handsome he was!

"Talk of patrician faces!" said Violet to herself. "I do not believe there is a peer in the world with more perfect and noble features."

She remembered the shapely head and neck, the dark eyes so full of fire and poetry, the mouth half hidden by the mustache her aunt detested; and she wondered that she had not cared more to look at the face when she was near it. She thought of it in her waking hours, and she dreamed of it in her sleep.

Aunt and niece remained on very dignified terms. Miss Atherton, toward the end of the evening, suggested that they should walk on the Warwick road. Violet declined, and no more was said on the subject.

"I never realized before what was wanting in my life," said Miss Beaton to herself. Her mind seemed suddenly to open to all life's possibilities, to all the disadvantages of her position. Till now she had been a simple light-hearted girl, enjoying such pleasures as fell to her lot, knowing of nothing better than that which she experienced. Now she saw there were a thousand innocent delights of which she knew nothing. She began to wonder whether all her life would be spent in the pretty lonely cottage by St. Byno's woods. Would she always live with Aunt Alice, half amused and half frightened at her? And then she wondered again how any break, any change would come, if her aunt locked the door upon her if ever she spoke to a stranger.

She busied herself with her sewing, her beautiful face bent over it, until Miss Atherton became slightly uncomfortable. She was glad the girl took her punishment quietly; but she would have liked to hear her talk and laugh in her usual fashion. Miss Atherton forgot that birds do not sing one-half so sweetly in a cage. Violet wondered whether the young artist would accept his dismissal quietly. He had seemed to be so happy with her, and to long so for her society. Would he go away and think no more of her?

It happened that that evening Miss Atherton had to go to a neighboring farm on a little matter of business. She did not ask Violet to accompany her; she thought a little punishment would not be amiss for her niece.

"I do not ask you to go with me to Redhill Farm,

Violet," she said, "as you have declined to accompany me for a walk. While you repair these things"—pointing to a pile of linen which lay on a side-table—"I should like you to reflect on your conduct."

"There can be no harm in my taking my work into the garden," Violet said to herself when Miss Atherton had departed, and thither accordingly she bent her footsteps.

She had not been there many minutes before a soft ball of Guelder roses fell at her feet. Looking up to see whence it came, she was not a little startled and astonished to see the young artist standing on the other side of the rose-covered hedge. She blushed and smiled when her eyes met his.

"May I come in?" he said. "I want to speak to you." She shook her head.

"No, indeed. This is Aunt Alice's garden. She does not admit strangers—young men, especially—"

"Will you come to me, then? Ah, Miss Beaton, have some compassion! I have been here since the morning, longing to catch one glimpse of you. I saw Miss Atherton go over to the farm, and then I knew my opportunity had arrived."

"Have you not been home?" she asked, wonderingly.

"No," he answered.

"You have waited here all this time, just for the hope of seeing me?"

"Yes," he replied. "I had made up my mind that I would not go away without another glimpse of you. I have been hating myself all day to think that I stood by quietly and saw you made prisoner. If it had been a man— But what can I do to a lady? It is your own fault if you remain in prison. You are not very happy here, are you?"

"No, not very," she answered, frankly. "I seem just beginning to awake. One month ago I was quite content—I was not rapturously happy, but I was far from miserable—now I am dissatisfied. I want to know a thousand things that I have never thought of before. I want to know what the world is like beyond this green, dreamy little spot, and it is your fault that I have conceived these vain desires."

"Mine!" he replied, with a flush of delight and pride. "I am delighted to hear it."

"I am not sure," she said, "whether you have acted very wisely. Now that I am awake to the realities and possibilities of life, it seems to me I shall never be satisfied with my present state of existence again. The question is whether it would not have been better for me to remain dormant."

"It is far better for you to be cognizant of all that is going on around you," he cried, with passionate vehemence. "Why should your bright beauty be buried here?"

"There is my aunt," cried Violet.

"Promise that you will see me again," he cried, with all the energy of despair—"here, to-morrow evening, when the moon shines, and that terrible aunt of yours has gone to sleep. Will you, Miss Beaton—Violet—will you come?"

And she had just time to whisper "Yes."

CHAPTER VI.

LORD RYVERS thought more seriously that night than he had ever thought before. He was madly in love with this beautiful girl. He told himself that he must win her for his wife, or he should never know happiness more.

He looked the position in the face. He was Baron Ryvers of Ryverswell, the sole heir of an ancient race, lord of Mount Avon in Hampshire, owner of one of the prettiest estates in the Isle of Wight, and a fine old castle and a moor in the Highlands, one of the most eligible and wealthy barons in England: and he was madly in love with a young girl who detested the aristocracy, and had told him she would never marry one of them.

Love had come to him as a terrible fever. It had taken possession of his whole being. As he walked home under the shade of the spreading trees, he vowed to himself that he would win her.

The beautiful face of the girl was ever before him. How he loved her! He had never thought it possible that he could care for any one like this. How beautiful she looked on the other side of the rose-covered hedge! Why had he not leaped over it, and caught her in his arms, and carried her away? His heart was on fire. No matter what obstacles were in the way, he would marry her, if she would have him; but he felt quite sure she would neither love nor marry him if she knew his position and title. He must

win her as an artist, if he won her at all ; and afterward when he had made her his wife, when he had taught her to love him so dearly that she could not live without him, he would tell her the whole truth ; she would not be angry then.

His fate, after all, would be happier than that of many men. How many were married simply for their title, wealth, or other outward advantages ! With him it would be quite different. He would be married for himself alone—for pure love. How he would repay her !

It was no easy task that lay before him. On the one hand, he had resolved to marry a girl who hated the aristocracy ; on the other hand, he would have to persuade his mother, who was certainly as proud a woman as any in England, to consent to his marriage with a penniless girl.

"She must consent," he cried to himself ; "she will consent ! If the difficulties were a thousand times greater than they are, I would fight my way through them."

Hitherto he had been scarcely more than a boy—kindly, noble, but a dreamer ; he was a man now, with a man's purpose.

Once more his thoughts went back to Ryverswell, where his mother dwelt in luxurious splendor. When Randolph had wrung from her permission to go on this sketching-tour—permission she granted sorely against her will—she said, when bidding him farewell :

"I do not warn you against the common faults of young men ; no son of mine will ever commit those. You are not likely to fall in love with a dairy-maid, or to marry a curate's daughter ; but, after this, I trust you will give up your notions of painting, and think seriously of settling in life. There are two or three girls," continued her ladyship, "whom I should have liked you to meet. There are Gwendoline Mar and Lotta Jocelyn, both beauties and both heiresses. But it is of no use speaking of that just now."

"None in the world," he had answered. "All I can think about at the present moment is my sketching-tour. You must consent, mother ; nothing else has any attractions for me—I have heard so much of those splendid Warwickshire trees. As for—for girls, there is plenty of time to discuss them in the future."

"Yes, there is plenty of time, as you observe ; and I can trust to you, Randolph. You have the true instincts

of a gentleman and a Ryvers. Why Providence should have given to my only son the tastes of a wondering artist will always be a puzzle to me. But I must say this for you, Randolph—your over-love of art is your greatest fault."

At the time he had kissed his mother laughingly; now he remembered with a little dismay that he had to ask her consent before he could marry.

Violet, however, was worth any effort, any trouble that he might experience in winning her. The old name held in reverence for so many generations, the old titles gallantly kept, the grand old home, the family honors—he would have sacrificed them all, would have laid them all at her feet.

The hot, impetuous love that, like a lava tide, swept all before it, was one of the characteristics of the race. The Ryverses were a very old family, and had come over to England with the Conqueror. They were a branch of the great De Riviere family. After they settled in England, as time went on they dropped the "De" and adopted the English method of spelling the name. They had not lost the Norman style of feature, the dark hair, and the dark eyes of the Norman race; but they were English enough in other respects. The family had passed through many vicissitudes; they had been sometimes rich, sometimes poor, but always loyal. A Ryvers stood by the side of Edward the First when he showed his infant son to the assembled chieftains; the Ryverses fought boldly in the Crusades; a Ryvers saved the King's life in the Wars of the Roses. If they did not accumulate money, they acquired fame and honor.

It was the Merrie Monarch who gave the grand old estate of Ryverswell to the head of the family, together with his barony.

The old race was fast becoming extinct now. When Philip, Lord Ryvers, died, he left three children, two daughters and one son. The son, being then only five years old, had a long minority before him. The elder daughter, Marguerite, a beautiful brunette, married the Earl of Lester. The second daughter, Monica, was still unmarried, and lived with Lady Ryvers. Personal beauty was one of the characteristics of the Ryvers family. Their daughters always married well, for they were among the

most beautiful women in the land, and their gift of beauty had brought them into relationship with some of the oldest families in the country. That Monica was still unmarried was her own fault. She had admirers in plenty, but none that pleased her.

During the minority of the young Baron, the family had resided at Ryverswell. When the young heir came of age he would live there; and, in the event of his marrying, his mother would retire to the Dower House, a pretty, picturesque dwelling standing near Mount Avon. Lady Ryvers was quite agreeable to this arrangement. She had enjoyed her life, had lived her day.

Her great anxiety now was to see her son well married. She had several eligible heiresses in view; but there was nothing to be done until he was cured of his art craze. It was a great blow to Lady Ryvers when, one day, her son turned to her and said :

"Mother, I wish I had been born to be an artist."

"My son," said the proud lady, regarding him in consternation, "never let me hear such a sentiment from your lips again. You may be a patron of art—the Ryverses have always been that—but an artist—oh, never!"

One might as well have forbidden the wind to blow, the stars to shine, or the flowers to grow, as have forbidden the young heir to paint. He was an artist born. He had the keen perceptions, the passion for color, the fine, true sense that show the artist. He began in the nursery, where his sketches were the admiration of nurses and servants. Lady Ryvers repressed his talent; she never praised it, never alluded to it, and made it a point always to speak of art and artists in the most contemptuous fashion; but she could not change the boy or alter his temperament.

A fine, brave, handsome young Englishman, Randolph, Lord Ryvers, was the pride and delight of the whole household. His mother almost worshiped him, his sisters loved and were proud of him. Now he had grown to the age of twenty, and this sketching-tour was to be one of the last indulgences of youth. His childhood and youth had been irreproachable; even Lady Ryvers herself admitted that his love of art had kept him from "anything worse." Mother and sisters were looking forward now to the time

when he should take home a wife to Ryversdale—one worthy to reign there and sustain the prestige of the grand old race.

And this was the young fellow who was going mad for love of Violet Beaton at St. Byno's.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE was no moon on the night Lord Ryvers had looked forward to with such anxiety; but the light scarcely dies out of the sky on a fair July night. From the bonny woods of St. Byno's a faint, sweet sound, like the echo of an *Aeolian* harp, reached Violet's ears; from the river came a soft, musical murmur.

It was not till after a hard struggle with her conscience that Violet went to keep her appointment. She consoled herself, however, with a false line of argument. Miss Atherton had forbidden her to leave the garden, and she was not going to leave it. She would be within the rose-covered hedge; and she would not have gone at all but that she really felt so sorry for the young artist. He had looked so handsome, so imploring, the promise to see him again had almost unconsciously been wrung from her.

It was all her aunt's fault. If she had allowed them to say good-by openly and quietly, there would have been no need for this twilight interview. After all, she did not quite like it. Her sense of propriety was opposed to it; but she could not let him go without one word; he had been so pleasant and kind to her. The girl's heart rebelled against her aunt. Why had she not asked the young artist in, and allowed them to spend an hour or two together? Then he would have said good-by, and would have gone out of their lives probably forever. Now she was going to do that which she would rather not have done.

"Go to your room at once," Miss Atherton had said, when the usual family devotions were over. "You will not want a candle. It is quite light enough. Good-night."

And then Miss Atherton had retired to rest, happily unconscious of her niece's meditated plans.

Meanwhile a handsome, ardent young lover moved softly through the deep shadows of St. Byno's wood, looking with anxious eyes that pierced them at the picturesque cottage. He went slowly down the riverside, crossed the

corner of the wood, passed the little gate where the white acacias grew, down by the rose-covered hedge, and then he stood still. Never had his heart beaten so before. There was no stir in the cottage; the white blinds were down. Would she come?

The Ryverses were not famous for patience; but the young lord had never been in such a fever of suspense before. Would she come? Ah, there was a stir, something surely was moving over the long grass that shook the white clover, and sent the acacia-leaves fluttering to the ground! But it was only the summer night breeze. Would she never come? A little bird in the far distance twittered. He heard the deep baying of a hound across the river.

"Oh, my love, my darling," he cried, "if you would but come!"

And just then the pale beautiful face of the young girl looked anxiously down through the shadows. She could not see him, and she did not know if he was there. Just as he had pictured her, she came out in her long blue dress; over her head she had thrown a black lace veil. It was darker than she thought it would be. She stopped for one moment under the chestnut-trees to reconnoiter before she passed on to the place of rendezvous. In another minute they were standing face to face, the handsome young lover and the fair-haired beautiful girl.

"How good of you to come!" he said. "I hardly dared hope you would do so."

"I ought not to have come," she said. "Do not praise me for doing what I know to be wrong; but you have been so kind to me, and I have enjoyed our intimacy so much, I did not like to think I should not see you again."

He was looking at the hedge.

"I am standing," he said, "outside the gates of Paradise. Will you open them for me?"

"I cannot," she answered.

"You can if you will. Tell me that I may leap over this hedge."

"I ought not to do so," she said.

"I cannot see you here, and I want to see your face again," he urged.

She was silent for a few moments. Then she thought to

herself that, as he was there, he might just as well be on one side of the hedge as the other.

" You may come," she said, softly. " But mind you do not fall."

" I could clear a hedge twice as formidable as that," he replied, with a laugh; and the next moment he was standing by her side.

" How strong and agile you are!" she said to him with a smile, looking admirably at him, as women do look at brave, manly men.

" Show me anything that I would not do to have the happiness of standing by your side for one minute. You said something to me about good-by. Do you think I could leave you?" His voice trembled with passion.

" I have never thought about it," she said. " I suppose you will go when your picture is finished?"

" I am quite sure I shall not. I do not care whether the picture is ever finished or not. I care for nothing—do you not see?—I care for nothing in the wide world but you."

" But me," she repeated, wonderingly—" but me?"

" Yes, you. You can send me away from you if you will; but think, for the mercy of Heaven, think before you do it. I love you, and I cannot leave you. I love you, and I would rather lie dead here at your feet than leave you. Do you understand, my beautiful, fair-haired darling? Is it madness to say I love you? Then I am of all men the most mad."

" You love me?" she repeated, gravely. " Why, you have only seen me three or four times!"

" It needed only for me to see you once to know that I had met my fate," he cried. " Love comes to us in varied guise. I saw you, and my heart went out to you at once. Something that had never lived in my soul before awoke into vigorous life. If I had known you fifty years I could not love you better. You are the fairest and most beautiful woman that ever gladdened a man's eyes, that ever wiled a man's heart from his breast; and I love you. If I had a thousand tongues they would all cry out, ' I love you, I love you!'"

" Hush!" she said, holding up one little hand. " You—you frighten me!"

"I frighten you!" exclaimed Lord Ryvers. "Ah, how unfit I am even to talk to one so beautiful, so gentle as you! Forgive me, and I will be as gentle as yourself. I only want to impress on you the fact that I love you, that while I live I can never again be happy away from you, that I would give my life and all it holds for you. Oh sweet, if you could only know how beautiful you look standing there, you would not wonder that I love you so! You have never had an admirer, have you?"

"An admirer!" she repeated, half trembling, half delighted. "I hardly know what you mean."

"Look at me," he cried—"I am your admirer—your lover. It means a man mad for a time, who sees, hears, knows, thinks of nothing but the one beloved."

"That must be tiresome," she answered, *naively*. "I should not like to have all my thoughts and ideas concentrated on one person."

"You would, if you loved him; that makes all the difference, you see."

"Love and admiration have been a sealed book to me," she said. "Indeed, I have never thought of them."

"Yet love is the very life of a woman," he cried, incredulously.

"It has not been mine," she said. "Hark! What is that?"—for there was a sudden commotion in one of the tall lime-trees near them.

"Probably a little bird had fallen from its nest," Lord Ryvers answered, smiling, for she was alarmed and clung to him.

He caught the little white hands in his own, and held them fast.

"I thought it was my aunt," she said, half laughing, half trembling.

"Never mind if it were. I would go to her if you would let me, and would tell her that her niece was the loveliest creature I had ever seen, that I loved her with my whole heart and longed to make her my wife."

"I should be locked up in the darkest cellar the house boasts, and never allowed to come out again," Violet declared, a little hysterically.

"I wonder," he said, gently, still holding the two little white hands in his own—"I wonder if you would be very angry if I called you **Violet**?"

"It would not be of much use to be angry about anything now," she said.

"Then I may. Oh, beautiful Violet, listen to me! I love you with all my heart; will you try to love me a little in return?"

She was silent. It was all so novel for her. Then she looked up at him with frank childlike eyes.

"You have taken me so by surprise," she said.

"Have you not thought of me at all?" he asked.

"Yes; but only as a nice, pleasant friend, different from every one else here in being of my own age."

He was silent for a few minutes; then he said, with a thrill of passion in his voice:

"You must do more than that now, Violet. I must be more than the pleasant friend whom you like because he is of your own age. Think of me, sweet, as the lover who loves you with such passionate devotion that he would die for you; the lover who has no joy, no happiness ~~but with~~ ~~you~~."

"It sounds quite poetical," she said.

"It is true!" he cried, vehemently. "Oh, Violet, how hard it is to make you understand! My darling, I knew when you spoke to me in the woods that day that you were simple as a child. You reminded me of a beautiful wild bird, so bright and free, and now I want to catch the wild bird and keep it as my own forever."

"I suppose that, really, if the truth were told, I did wrong in answering your questions," she said half ruefully.

"You could not do anything wrong, I am sure," he declared. "Tell me," he continued after a pause, "if I had gone away without seeing you again, without saying good-by, would you have cared, would you have been unhappy, would you have remembered me?"

She thought over his words before she answered them.

"I should have been very sorry, but not unhappy," she replied. "I should not have forgotten you; and I am glad, honestly glad, to see you again."

His face brightened as he gazed on her fair, shy loveliness.

"Thank you for so much," he said. "I will teach you the rest; that is the beginning; the rest will come. You are glad to see me. Heaven bless you!"

He bent down and kissed the fair hands that lay so chill

and quiet in his own. And the first caress ever given to her stirred the maiden depths of her heart and soul as a pebble thrown into a deep lake disturbs its surface. If Aunt Alice could but have seen that! Violet shuddered as the thought passed through her mind, and he thought that she was vexed at his caress.

"Oh, Violet, if you would, if you could but learn to love me a little!" he said. "Love wins love. Will you try?"

"I might try," she whispered; "but I am not at all sure that I should succeed."

"I shall be quite content at present if you will try. You have no other admirer, and you love no one else. I see no reason, my darling, why I should not win you in time. I will live for you; I will love you so well, so dearly, that you shall not be able to help loving me. I am happier than I dared hope; I am happier than I deserve to be. You might have sent me away; you have listened, and you will love me in time. I have been talking to you all this time, and, Violet, I have not seen your eyes. Raise them to mine, sweetheart, that I may see what they say."

Slowly enough the white lids moved, the long fringed lashes were raised, and the dark, violet eyes looked sadly into his.

"What beautiful eyes!" he cried. "And they tell me that you do love me a little. Is it true?"

His own were so full of passionate adoration that hers fell before them.

"I am frightened," she said, with a shudder. "My heart beats. Oh, let me run away; I must not stay here! What have you done to me? It is as though my heart and soul were stirred with mingled pleasure and pain."

She tried to draw away the little white hands; but he would not release them.

"My beautiful sweetheart, listen to me."

But she interrupted him.

"I am not your sweetheart. You must not use that word to me."

"That is just the question," he said. "Will you be my sweetheart? I will not ask more just yet; consent to that, and I shall be the happiest man in the wide world. My sweetheart, my beautiful, gentle, graceful sweetheart, will you? If you do not like me, you can bid me depart; but

If you learn to love me, you will make this earth-paradise to me."

She was frightened, startled ; but her heart did not beat with rapture, nor were her lips mute with the glad surprise that comes to most young girls when their lover speaks.

" Think for a few minutes, and then answer me," Lord Ryvers went on ; " and remember, it is not a man's fancy, but a man's life, that hangs on the word. I do not wish to influence you unduly ; but, if you say me nay, I shall fling myself away as one flings away a worthless weed. Oh, Violet, is your heart cold to me ; are your eyes blind, your lips dumb ? I stand here before you, my heart in my words, my life in your hands. Now tell me ; will you be my sweetheart ? "

He threw his arm round her with a caressing gesture, as though he would protect her from everything hurtful ; and it was this gesture of his, this half caress, that touched her heart.

" Say 'yes,' Violet. You shall never repent it," her lover pleaded, passionately. " You do not know what life is ; I will teach you. Open your pure young heart to the influence of love. Whisper that one word to me, Violet."

He bent his handsome head to catch the faint sound. She thought for a few minutes, and then she answered :

" Yes."

CHAPTER VIII.

" You have sold a picture, Randolph, I am sure," was the greeting Lord Ryvers received one morning, when he saw Violet coming from the Hill farm.

He went often to the Hill Farm now, for Miss Atherton had caught a violent cold, which had caused her to relax her vigilance and send her beautiful niece out in her stead—not for long rambles for her own pleasure, that was plainly understood ; but it was necessary for her to go to Warwick once or twice in the week, and also to the Hill Farm on little matters of business ; and though it struck Miss Atherton more than once that her niece was a long time absent, she never dreamed of the cause.

Lord Ryvers had made himself quite at home at the Hill Farm ; the farmer and his buxom wife knew him as a young artist who admired the quiet sylvan scenery of the neigh-

borhood. Miss Beaton's name never passed his lips ; but, as by a tacit understanding, the good-natured mistress of the farm always mentioned in his presence—quite accidentally, to all appearance—when Miss Beaton was coming—never addressing herself pointedly to him, but always to some bystander. It happened that Violet saw him every day. He was very gentle with her. He seemed to be content with the victory he had gained that evening when she had whispered her consent to be his sweetheart.

He would walk by her side and hold her hand in a long lingering clasp, but he never startled her more with passionate words or caresses. He was too wise and too intent on winning her. On this particular morning it was about half way between the farm and Acacia Cottage that they had met, when she greeted him with the words—

“ You have sold a picture, Randolph, I am sure.”

“ What makes you say so ? ” he asked.

“ You know. Oh, Randolph, how you love mystery, and how I hate it ! You know what I found in my canary's cage this morning—only this morning ; ” and the beautiful eyes were turned to him with mingled pleasure and wonder. “ What a place to put a packet in ! ” she continued. “ Suppose my aunt had gone to the cage the first thing this morning to feed the bird ? ”

“ I knew she would not. From the chestnut-tree in the field I can see all that passes in your garden. Every morning I see you going to feed your bird after you have hung its cage up in the porch.”

“ I believe that you know everything I do and say,” she replied, laughing and blushing. “ Oh, Randolph, how beautiful it is ! ”

That morning, on going to feed her canary, Violet found a little parcel in the cage. It was addressed to “ My beautiful sweetheart,” and she knew at once that Randolph had climbed the garden wall, and had placed it there for her. Opening it, she found a diamond ring, and, though she knew little of jewels, she felt that it must have cost a large sum. She had at once jumped to the conclusion that, to buy this for her, her artist-lover must have sold a picture, perhaps at a great sacrifice. How dearly he loved her ! And her heart reproached her that she did not love him more. He looked delighted when she praised his present. “ I

"I'm so glad you are pleased with it!" he said. "Have you put it on?"

"Randolph, a diamond ring! What would my aunt say? No; I have locked it up in my drawer."

"Will you let me put it on for you?" he asked.

"Some day, perhaps," she replied; "but not yet—not yet, Randolph."

"I am very patient, Violet; I would wait all my life for you rather than lose you. Sweetheart, it was the second of June when I first saw you, and the harvest-moon will soon be shining."

"You said you would be content if I would be your sweetheart," she said, half reproachfully, half in surprise, "and I have been your sweetheart all these weeks, Randolph. What more do you want?"

"What more?" and he looked at her in surprise. "Everything, Violet. But tell me why you think I have sold a picture."

"Because that ring must have cost so much money."

"I see!" he cried. "Do not be distressed about the money, Violet. I assure you that I have not sold one of my pictures, and that I had the money by me; I had, my dear, indeed."

"Now I shall enjoy my present," she said, her eyes brightening. "All my life I have longed for a beautiful ring. It shines, Randolph, as though a myriad sunbeams were concentrated in it."

"You are not mercenary," he said.

"I? Oh, Randolph, what a terrible idea! I mercenary—"

"I was thinking," he interrupted, "that you would not enjoy anything that you thought had cost any one else a sacrifice. If you thought I had sold a picture to buy that ring, you would not care for it."

"I should not care for it so much," she replied. "I have heard my aunt speak of diamonds; I know how valuable they are. I never thought I should have a diamond ring."

"One of these nights, when the moon is shining, you will let me come and put it on for you, will you not? We have been sweethearts now for many weeks. Are you so content, Violet, that you wish for no more?"

"It is very nice," she replied, carelessly. "It is quite new for me to have some one who admires me, and says

pretty things to me, who gives me beautiful presents and makes life more bright and cheerful for me. I am not sure that I want more."

"Now, Violet, stand still—how quickly you are walking, my darling, this morning!—stand still a moment, look into the very depths of your heart, and tell me would you like always to live in this fashion, to be no nearer and no dearer to me than you are now?"

She stood still and looked at him thoughtfully.

"What does your heart say, Violet?" he asked.

"It says nothing," she replied. "I am very happy."

"Have you no longing to be with me always?" he asked.
"I should like to see more of you," she replied, "certainly."

"When I am away from you, do you count the hours and minutes until I return?"

"No; but I am pleased when you come back."

"Oh, beautiful statue, when will you wake into life?" he cried. "When will your heart and soul be stirred within you? You have none of the love that burns my heart away. How shall I teach you? When will one spark of the 'divine fire' come to you? What can I do to make you love me?"

"I do love you," she said; but there was no girlish flush on her face, no love-light in her eyes.

"I must be content," he said. "You are my sweetheart, and you love me after your own fashion. You will love me better some day. Can you guess, Violet, why I have wanted so much to see you this morning?"

"No," she replied; "I could never guess."

"Dear one," he said, earnestly, "it is a great happiness to have you for my sweetheart, greater than I can tell; but I want you to be something nearer and dearer. I want you to be my wife."

"You are never satisfied, Randolph," she answered. "If I were to be your wife, you would still want something more."

"Hardly; there can be nothing nearer, nothing dearer than a wife," he replied, with a half smile. "I should be more than content if you would promise that."

"It is so much to promise, Randolph," she said—"so much!"

"If you are going to refuse me this, it would have been

better never to be kind to me at all—a thousand times better!" he declared, passionately. "I could not lose you now. A month since I might have borne it, and have lived. Think of it, Violet. If you will marry me you shall have your heart's desire. I will take you to see the fairest lands on which the sun shines; you shall see earth's noblest cities, Italy's art treasures, Switzerland's snow-capped mountains, all the beauties and marvels of creation; you shall have every wish gratified."

"You talk like a prince, Randolph," she answered, calmly. "How could you do all this? It would take a fortune."

"I would spend a hundred fortunes on you," he answered, eagerly.

"But you must have them first," she rejoined, laughingly; "and you have not."

"I will make them," he said. "Violet, you told me once that you would not marry an aristocrat."

"And I meant it," she cried.

"If one stood here before you now, with the most ancient and honorable of titles, with a fortune that would make you a queen of fashion, would you not marry him?"

"No," she replied, with sovereign contempt; "I would never be false to the opinions of my life. I will marry a man who makes his own name by his own industry and talent. I shall never make you understand how I dislike the aristocracy. You would have no chance at all if you were an aristocrat, Randolph," she added, laughing; "but it is greatly in your favor that you are an artist. Of all professions, I like that of an artist best."

"How glad I am!" he said.

"Ever since I first met an artist sketching in St. Byno's woods, I have liked men of his profession. They seem to be gentlemen, all of them. I am glad you are an artist, Randolph," she added, musingly. "I cannot imagine a bad-tempered artist."

"That is not the question, Violet. The manners of artists might interest me at any other time, but not just now. You forget the question I have asked you—will you be my wife? Think how much I love you, how happy you might make me; think of the pleasant life that I would plan for you, and think, though your Warwickshire home is beautiful, how monotonous the life is. Listen to me, sweet Vio-

let. Just now all is bright and glad. You are young and beautiful, you are so full of vitality that the veriest trifle is a pleasure to you, and you find all existence bright and fair. But, my darling, the years will roll on, and Time, most ruthless of enemies, will come and seal your youth, your brightness, the roses from your face, and the light from your eyes. Oh, my darling, can you think of spending all your fresh bright life in that solitary house, of having no one to love but that stern, querulous aunt of yours? Oh, my darling, have pity upon yourself!"

For the first time he saw tears in her eyes.

" You have to choose between sunlight and darkness," he urged.

" Give me time to think," she pleaded.

" I will give you time. Take two days. This is Tuesday morning; on Thursday let me see you, even if I can not speak to you. Let me see you standing by the great chestnut-tree; and, if you will marry me, wear a bunch of scarlet geraniums in your blue dress. If I see it there, I shall thank Heaven indeed!"

* * * * *

Two whole days to pass in terrible suspense! Lord Ryvers forgot all about his difficulties; he forgot his stately mother's proud aspirations, the hopes she had built up as to his future; he could think only of one thing, whether, when those two days had passed, he should see the scarlet bloom of the geraniums worn by the woman he loved. If he saw her standing beneath the chestnut-tree with no scarlet flowers on her bosom, he should give up title and estates, should never care for aught again in this world. Thinking of all this, he fretted at the delay.

" Why did I say I would wait two days for her answer?" he asked himself. " She could have decided in one. Perhaps the more time she has to think, the less chance will there be for me."

He could do one thing that would help to pass a few hours away. He went over the next day to Warwick, and there purchased a bouquet of the finest scarlet geraniums. Quite early the following morning, before any one in the cottage was astir, he stole through the garden and placed them where Violet must see them when she went to feed her bird. He stood for some minutes trying to fancy what would

happen—whether she would fling them away with scorn, or whether she would take a vivid scarlet spray and fasten it in the bodice of her dress.

He had made his home at "The Barley Mow," a pretty wayside inn that might have been the original of the world-famous "May-pole." This morning the landlady of "The Barley Mow," as she carried away his untouched breakfast said to him :

" You are not well, sir ; you walk too much, or you work too hard ; give yourself a day's rest."

He laughed to himself. What rest would there be for him until he should have learned his fate ?

The breakfast being carried away, he went out. Better would it be to spend the minutes of consuming torture out in the open air, where no one could comment on his appearance or wonder at his words. And, as he walked along, he repeated over and over again a song that recurred to his mind—

" I fain would speak, yet dare not, for
Her gentle soul's distress.
What is to me one sorrow more,
So that she has one less ?

" Yet I could wish, when I am dead,
Her eyes should look through mine;
And on my heart engraven read
This motto ' Dir Allein ! ' "

How the words seemed to echo through his brain over and over again ! Then a bird flew from the great oak-tree, and he thought of Swineburne's beautiful line :

" A bird to the right sung follow."

The bird did fly to the right ; it went over the river, and into the orchard that belonged to Acacia Cottage. He would follow ; he had told her that he should be there by ten, and it was yet only nine. Would she have found the geraniums ? And, if she had, would she wear them ?

He could see all over the garden and orchard from the green lane that ran parallel with them, and there he stood awaiting his doom. He remembered once to have read that when a man stood up to hear his sentence of death passed it was not the terrible words that impressed him so much

as every little detail of the scene in court ; so he found it with himself now. The one great issue seemed to pass by him, as though he hardly knew why he was there, and the smaller details seemed to press upon him. The linden-trees, under which he had asked her to stand for a brief moment, grew at the end of the garden, a plum-tree stood near. He saw the birds seeking and enjoying the ripest plums, then flying in search of other sweets ; he saw a kitten, soft and white as a snowball, creep along the wall, climb the tree, and lie in wait for a small bird, and then he saw the flutter of a blue dress amongst the trees. His suspense would soon be ended now.

Down the garden paths, over the grass, across to the white rails, came Violet ; and then she stood for one minute under the branches of the linden-tree.

Lord Ryvers' eyes flashed with happy pride, his face flushed with passionate delight, his heart beat fast, his pulse thrilled. She had looked over the hedge into the lane, and he saw the gleam of golden hair, the beauty of her pure young face, and—ah, Heaven be thanked!—the scarlet genaniums on her breast.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT same afternoon Lord Ryvers went boldly to Acacia Cottage. After all, to face a tall, angular lady with a great dislike to his sex was not perhaps the most alarming ordeal in the world. He knocked at the door, which, in answer to his summons, was opened by the little maid. She looked considerably alarmed at the sight of the tall, handsome stranger, so imposing a visitor never having, within her experience, called upon her mistress.

"I want to see Miss Atherton," said the young lord, "is she at home?"

The little maid dropped a courtesy, but made no reply ; her astonishment and fright seemed to have stricken her dumb.

"Do you think I could see Miss Atherton?" repeated Lord Ryvers, a trifle impatiently, seeing that the girl made no attempt to speak.

Still without a word she ushered the visitor into the little parlor. Lord Ryvers had not long to wait before Miss Atherton made her appearance. She hastily closed the

door behind her, then, turning, confronted her unwelcome guest. She looked ready to encounter a legion of lovers ; there was no sign of quailing in her eyes or face.

" You wished to see me," she began, sternly.

" Yes," he replied. " I should be glad to have a few minutes' conversation with you."

" You are the young man with whom I met my niece once ?" she said, severely.

" I am that most fortunate of men," he replied.

Miss Atherton turned half contemptuously away.

" What do you want with me ?" she questioned, curtly.

" I love your niece, and I have come to ask your permission to marry her," he said, plunging without any preamble into the subject nearest his heart.

" That you will never obtain," said Miss Atherton, coldly.

" Then, madam, with all due deference to you, I shall marry her without," he replied.

" We shall see," said the lady, still calmly. " For my own part, I would rather see my niece locked up in a lunatic asylum than married."

Lord Ryvers bowed, for he was at a loss for words.

" Young man," said Miss Atherton, solemnly, " do not stand there bowing at me. Does my niece know of this nonsense ?"

" Miss Beaton did not know of my intention to call this afternoon. The fact of the matter is that I really could not wait any longer."

She glanced at him angrily.

" You will have to exercise your patience to a much greater extent," she said. " I shall countenance nothing of the kind." Then, with stern mien, she rang the bell. Did no remembrance come to her of the old sweet time when her heart had beaten, and her eyes had grown dim with tears ? " Tell Miss Beaton I want her," she said the wondering maid ; and, after a brief interval, Violet appeared.

She looked so shy, so coy, so lovely, as she entered, blushing and startled, that the young lord lost his head altogether, and was on the point of committing himself in unpardonable fashion, when a look from Miss Atherton restrained him.

" Violet," said her aunt, grimly, " this young man has

come to ask me if he may marry you. I say 'No.' You hear me, Violet? I object to it."

Beautiful, blushing Violet looked at her lover as though she would say, "You must take up the challenge, Randolph."

Stepping forward, he took his stand by Violet's side; then he clasped one of her little white hands in his, Miss Atherton looking on with cold displeasure.

"We hope," he said, "that you will give your permission. We shall be married in any case; but Violet would be much happier if you consented, for she cannot forget all your kindness to her."

"It needs no stranger to tell me that," said Miss Atherton. "Violet, do you—do you love this young man? Do you wish to marry him?" with an air of lofty disdain.

"I should not mind, aunt," answered Violet, faintly.

Then Miss Atherton's heart thrilled with a passing reminiscence of the old passion. If the man she had loved so faithfully had asked her to marry him, she would not have answered in calm tones like Violet. She hated the very thought of love and matrimony; but she turned from her niece with a gesture of contempt to Lord Ryvers.

"Am I to understand that my niece professes to love you?"

"I am more than content," he replied. "If Miss Beaton will marry me, I will make her the happiest wife in the world, and I will devote my whole life to her."

"Men all say the same thing!" groaned Miss Atherton.

She saw with her mind's eye the branches of a spreading almond-tree and a handsome face bending over her. She heard a voice, the music of which had long ceased for her, saying again and again, "Trust and love me, darling; you will see."

She had loved and trusted, and what had been the result? Did a similar fate attend the fair child who had grown up by her side? Would her love and trust both be betrayed in similar fashion?

"You do not seem to me, Violet, to know your own mind," continued Miss Atherton. "Do you love this young artist or not?"

"I—I like him very much, aunt," faltered the girl.

"Like him!" repeated Miss Atherton, scornfully.

"What a word to use! Do you love him, child? Do you feel as though you would die if you lost him?"

For once the passion that had so long been repressed shone in Miss Atherton's face, and the two young people standing before her looked at her in wonder. It was as though a ghost had suddenly appeared before them, and vanished as it came.

"Speak up bravely!" whispered the young fellow.
"Have no fear, Violet. Say that you love me."

Then she looked up, with sweet, shy eyes.

"I do love him, aunt; and, if you are willing, I should like to marry him."

Miss Atherton looked at her niece's lover. How handsome he was! If she had not heard that he was an artist, she would have felt convinced that he was an aristocrat. The lofty bearing, the carriage of the head, the perfect features, all indicated high birth and breeding. Well, no wonder that her niece, foolish Violet, had been struck with him.

"I know," said Miss Atherton, speaking in her usual calm, even tones once more, "that I might as well try to stop the rush of the river as prevent the marriage of two young people, if they are bent upon it; but I suppose the madness of lovers will, in some degree, be swayed by common sense. You wish to marry my niece, sir. Now, tell me whether your means are sufficient to keep her, to surround her with the comforts to which she has always been accustomed."

A hot flush suffused Violet's fair face, while Lord Ryvers could scarcely restrain himself from bursting into loud laughter.

"I am bound to ask you whether your income is adequate to support the burden you propose to take upon yourself," persisted Miss Atherton.

"I am an artist, madam," he replied.

"But do you earn money enough to live upon?" the lady asked. "That is the practical question. It is all very well for a man to call himself an artist. The question is, what does he make by his art?"

"I can keep myself with perfect ease, madam," replied Lord Ryvers, with a smile.

"And what of my niece?" asked Miss Atherton.

"I can give the same answer as to your niece," he re-

plied. "If you will forgive me for saying so, I shall provide her with even greater comforts than you have done."

"What proof have you to give me of this?" she asked.

"I can only give you my word," he answered, with some little pride—"nothing else. If you trust your niece to me, you must take my word that I shall love, cherish, and protect her."

"Have you a home for her?" inquired Miss Atherton. "I do not approve of young people going into apartments."

He thought of Ryversdale, and smiled.

"I thought," he replied, "of going abroad for a year or two. Violet would like such an arrangement, I believe; so should I."

Miss Atherton raised her hands and eyes in protest. This was indeed the climax. To go abroad, to wander like vagrants all over the Continent. Nothing could be worse than wandering artists. Miss Atherton was at her wits' end.

"I suppose," she said, despairingly, "that nothing will prevent this absurd nonsense, that no prayer or pleading of mine can put a stop to this imprudent marriage?"

"I am sure not," replied Lord Ryvers.

"Then I wash my hands of it," she said, solemnly. "You have had the candor to tell me that my refusal or consent will make no difference. It is useless to forbid; I will not consent. I leave you to please yourselves; but I protest against it."

There was a moment of blank silence; then Violet spoke, her face pale with emotion.

"Aunt, have you nothing to say to me kinder than this? I have no father to bless me, no mother to kiss me."

"I cannot speak kindly in a matter of which I so strongly disapprove," said Miss Atherton, with energy.

"I understand you neither refuse your consent to our union nor give it your sanction," said Lord Ryvers. "Then, if I ask you to allow the marriage to take place, we will say, on the twenty-second of September, you will accede to my request?"

"I will neither accede nor refuse," replied Miss Atherton. "I enter my protest against such a foolish, senseless marriage. I can do no more. My niece is under my charge; until now she has been an adopted daughter to me. If she chooses to marry, I shall accompany her to church,

and see that all is right ; but the day she leaves my house to become your wife, she leaves it forever."

He turned with reckless impulse to Violet, and took her in his arms ; he kissed the quivering lips and weeping eyes.

" My darling," he said, " do not be so distressed. It is time I took you away. If she is cruel, I will be kind ; my love shall make up to you for the loss of all others."

" When I was young," cried Miss Atherton, " girls had more modesty, young men more self-restraint."

" I should think you never were young, in the right sense of the word, Miss Atherton ! " cried the young lord, angered by the tears of his betrothed.

Had she never been ? Over the seared, blighted heart passed a wave of memory.

" I do not wish to be cruel," she said. " I did not intend to make you unhappy, Violet ; but I detest the very thought of matrimony, and I think it is a sad thing to see a young girl like you ruin her whole life in this mad fashion ;" and, in spite of herself, a sigh escaped the grim woman as she thought how fair a thing was going out from her own life.

" It is a settled thing," said the young lord. " Violet is my betrothed wife, and, on the twenty-second of September, she will be my very own. But, in the interim, when may I be permitted to see her ? "

" The house is open ; you will never be refused admittance when you call ; and you may call," she added, half unwillingly, " whenever you like."

She wondered why he smiled. He remembered pressing invitations lavished upon him by Belgravian mothers, prettily worded notes he had been in the habit of constantly receiving, and he enjoyed the present contrast. This was wooing in the face of difficulties, and no mistake !

" I thank you, madam," he said. " I shall call twice every day," he added, raising his head with something of defiance—" once in the morning for a short time, to see how my—my future wife is, and I shall ask that I may spend my evenings with her."

" My house will never be my own," declared Miss Atherton, a trifle irritably, " with a young man prowling about it."

" I will not prowl about the house, Miss Atherton," he replied, with some spirit. " I assure you that no one is

less inclined to play the part of a tame cat than am I. When the evenings are fine, Violet and I shall enjoy a walk together. I shall not need to intrude on you hospitality."

She liked him all the better for that little display of spirit. Her heart was just a little touched by his handsome face and manly way. Perhaps there was a slight feeling of envy that her niece should win such a husband, while the man whom she had loved had forsaken her.

"Do you love my niece?" she asked, with another of those sudden gleams of passion.

"I love her with my whole heart," he replied; and Miss Atherton said no more.

All the chivalry of the lover's heart was touched by the sweet, pained face of the girl. It did seem hard that her engagement and marriage should be discussed in this cold, calm manner.

"My darling," he said, taking her hand in his own warm clasp, "I am grieved for you; but I will make it all up to you. In the future my life shall be devoted to your service."

"I do not wish to interrupt any sentimental scenes," said Miss Atherton, "but I wish to make one remark—it is a commonplace one, I am aware. You tell me that you hope to keep your wife and yourself by your work. What is to become of your work, if you are to visit my niece twice each day, and to spend the rest of your life in paying her devoted attention?"

An amused smile crossed his face.

"What a practical, sensible woman you are, Miss Atherton! You know the old Latin quotation, 'To work is to play.' I must change it into this, 'To work is to love.' I must prove my love by my work."

"It will be well if you do so," she observed, quietly. "And now, if you have no more to say on the matter, I will leave you."

"You will let Violet remain with me for a few minutes?" he entreated.

Miss Atherton shrugged her shoulders.

"In ten minutes' time Violet will be wanted to make tea; she can remain with you until then. I wish you good afternoon," she said, ungraciously.

With head erect, Miss Atherton quitted the room: yet,

as she crossed the little hall, something that had been long dead in her heart awoke, and filled her eyes with tears.

Ah, that, sweet long ago! Her hair was not gray then, but waving and bright. She was not angular, grim, and stern in those days, but blithe and happy, Alas for the lost youth, the lost, lost love! Alas for the days which would return no more!

"It will be just the same with her," she thought. "She will love and hope, trust and wait, and meet with betrayal in the end."

Meanwhile the young lover impatiently clasped his beautiful sweetheart in his arms.

"My darling," he cried, "what a terrible woman for you to live with! How well you have borne the trying ordeal through which you have passed!"

"Randolph," she said, gently, "why have you taken me so entirely by surprise? Why did you not tell me you were coming to see my aunt?"

"For the best of all reasons, my dear. You would not have allowed me to come; you would have found a hundred reasons why my visit should be deferred. Now, is not that true, Violet?"

"Perhaps so," she replied.

"And, my dear," he said, "it is all very well; but I could not bear much more of this suspense. Oh, Violet, my darling, will you ever understand how tender and deep is my love for you?"

CHAPTER X.

THE 22d of September was one of the fairest days that ever dawned, bright and warm, with a clear blue sky.

The wedding-day had come quickly. Once, and only once, had Violet mentioned her approaching marriage to the stern woman whose heart had been seared in her youth.

"Aunt," she had ventured to say, "when girls are married, they have a nice wedding-dress, do they not?"

"Some do, and some do not," she replied.

"They have new clothes, do they not? Do you know, aunt, that I have but two dresses?"

"Yes, I know," replied Miss Atherton; "but I cannot help it. I have found the money to educate, clothe, and

feed you. I shall not attempt to defray the expenses of your marriage."

The tears rose to Violet's eyes.

"Must I leave home, then," she said, "without even a decent dress to be married or to travel in?"

"I am afraid so," replied Miss Atherton. "If you were going to settle in any other way, I would part with half my income to be of service to you; but I will not raise one finger to help you to get married."

Violet said to her lover that same evening:

"Randolph, did you tell me one day that you liked the blue dress I wear better than any you have ever seen?"

"Yes, a thousand times better," he replied—"better than the royal robes of a queen, or the court dress of a duchess."

"What do you know of queens or duchesses?" she asked, laughingly.

He checked himself just in time.

"At least, Violet, I like it better than any dress I have seen worn by royal and stately dames in a picture."

"I am so glad," she said. Then, looking at him with sweet, pained eyes, she whispered, "Randolph, I want to speak to you about something very important."

He was delighted, charmed.

"What is it, my darling?" he asked. "You make me the happiest man in the world. What do you wish to speak to me about?"

"I wonder if you will mind it very much," she said, clasping her white hands around his arm—the nearest approach to a caress that she had ever given him.

She looked up with such anxious, wistful eyes into his face that he thought she must surely have some great favor to ask him. He gave a sudden start of alarm.

"Oh, Violet," he cried, "you are not surely going to ask me to let Miss Atherton live with us?"

She laughed so heartily that her hands fell from his arm, and all the pathos died from her face.

"It is not one half so dreadful as that. Oh, Randolph, what an idea! Why, Randolph, Aunt Alice would no more live in the same house with a man than she would fly! You could not dread her more than she dreads you; but it was not of her I wished to speak. Randolph, I am so dreadfully ashamed to tell you."

"You can surely say anything you like to me!"

"Take courage, my darling. If it be the half of my kingdom that you desire, you shall have it."

"What kingdoms have you except in the realms of fancy?" she said with a laugh. "Randolph, it is about my wedding-dress I want to speak to you." Once more she clasped her white hands round his arm, and gazed with wistful eyes into her lover's face. "Randolph, now tell me the absolute truth. Should you mind very much if I were married in my old blue dress?"

"Not one whit," he answered, stanchly. "To my mind, no other dress could suit you so well."

"It seems a very shabby thing to be married in an old dress," she said; "but I have no money of my own, and my aunt is so angry with me that I am afraid I shall have no more dresses until—"

"Until I buy you some," he interrupted. "That will be delightful."

Violet's mind was greatly relieved; she felt more blithe and happy than ever. Very likely she thought to herself, when she married, if Randolph were really successful with a picture, she might have even three new dresses at once—almost as many as she had ever dared contemplate in her whole life.

The next day was a dull one for her. Randolph said that he had business to attend to in town; he must run up for a day or two; he wanted some fresh materials for painting; and the tradespeople made such mistakes, it would be better for him to go himself.

Violet was very unwilling to leave him. It would be dull, she said. Her aunt was so cross with her, and, if he went away, what was she to do? Still it was only for two days; and they parted with kisses and tears. It was the first time she had shed tears over him, the first time she had kissed him; and the young lover's heart was aglow.

He returned with plenty of new material for work, he said, and happy because his wedding day was drawing near.

One morning, aunt and niece were sitting at the window, Miss Atherton a little grimmer than usual.

"The carrier is coming here, Violet," the latter observed suddenly. "What can he want?"—for the visit of the carrier was a great event at the pretty, secluded cottage.

"He has brought the grocer's parcel, I should think, aunt," replied Violet.

"Why, my dear," cried Miss Atherton, surprised beyond measure, "it is a box—two—two large boxes! Do see what it means, and if there is anything to pay."

No, there was nothing to pay; and the carrier brought in the boxes. They were too large to stand in the entrance hall, so Miss Atherton ordered them to be brought into the dining-room, an innovation that caused Violet to wonder.

"From London!" cried Miss Atherton. "Now, Violet, lose no time. Stay; do not cut the cords, they may be useful. I will untie them."

Miss Atherton knelt down by the great trunks, and, after long and patient labor, the knots were untied, the lids thrown back. In each lay a white card bearing this inscription—"To my sweetheart."

"Aunt," cried Violet, "what does this mean?"

"We shall soon see," replied Miss Atherton, beginning to unpack with vigorous hands.

The first thing she took out was a beautiful wedding-dress made of pale blue silk, the very fac-simile of the blue dress Violet had, except that it was made of silk instead of cashmere, and prettily trimmed with white lace and orange-blossoms; there was a simple and elegant white veil; there was the wedding-wreath, all orange blossoms; and, when Miss Atherton took it up in her hands, all unconsciously her tears fell upon it.

"Aunt Alice, do you see your tears have fallen on my orange-blossoms?" Violet exclaimed.

Miss Atherton looked at her with wistful eyes.

"My dear," she said, gently, "believe me, there is nothing so sad or so pitiful in life as the sharp, cruel thorns the orange-blossoms hide?"

Then they found dainty silk slippers, white gloves, a lace handkerchief—in short, everything requisite for a bridal toilet, not magnificent but simple and beautiful. The next thing was a complete traveling-costume, composed of fawn-colored velvet. Then there were two evening-dresses, over which Aunt Alice shook her head in undisguised horror, one of dark, the other of light silk. There was also two or three pretty walking-costumes and a morning-dress.

But there was something more wonderful still—a parcel addressed to Miss Atherton. She opened it, and found a black silk dress, a shawl, a cap of point lace, and many other things for which she had longed, but which she had

never possessed. With all these things spread around them, aunt and niece looked at each other.

"These are the gifts of your lover, Violet," said the stern lady, with a slight relaxation of the face. "He is very generous, I must say, but equally imprudent. He must have spent all he has in the world."

"He has sold a picture," said Violet, to whom the selling of a picture accounted for everything wonderful in a financial way.

"Probably," said Miss Atherton; "but, if he squanders in this way all the money he makes by his pictures, what will you live upon?"

"He will not do it again," said Violet; it is only this once. Perhaps, after all, he did not really like the idea of my being married in an old blue dress.

"You have discussed the subject with him, then?" said Miss Atherton, dryly.

"Oh, yes!" replied Violet, eagerly. "I told him I had little choice in the matter of dress, and he said nothing could suit me better than the old blue cashmere; he never hinted even at making me this present. Perhaps he has more money than most of the artists who have come to sketch at St. Byno's."

"He certainly knows how to spend it," said Miss Atherton; and she made many mental comments on the matter.

She did not do what Violet feared—forbid her to keep the contents of the box; she accepted her own share and was pleased to do so.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was Violet Beaton's wedding-day, the 22nd of September. The sun shone, as it had not for some days, with a radiant warmth that gladdened the whole earth.

"My wedding-day!" was Violet's first thought on opening her eyes; but there was no passionate rush of happiness through her heart; she was simply well pleased, well content. She liked to think of her handsome young lover, to remember the loving look in his eyes, to think of the music of his voice; it was pleasant to recall the loving words he had lavished upon her, to remember how fond he was of her.

"And from to-day," said the girl to herself, "I shall be

always with him ; we shall never be apart again. I wonder if I shall like that ? ”

After thinking over the matter for a short time, she came to the conclusion that it would be, in her girlish mode of expression, “ very nice.” It would be “ nice,” in the first place, to have a companion who was young and light of heart.

She thought of his kindness, of his indulgence to her, of the caressing voice in which he had always spoken to her. She thought of her pretty dresses, of all the beautiful presents he had made her. The life lying before them seemed so fair. He was to take her to all the lovely spots of which she had read and heard, and then they were to settle in a quiet, beautiful home ; and then—well, her imagination failed her—then there was something like a blank. She could not realize what was to come, after all the excitement of traveling was over. There was no longing for home, and above all, for home with him, in her heart ; but it would all be nice, pleasant, cheery, sunshiny—different from the lonely life she had led with her grim old aunt.

Yet, pleasant as was the prospect before her, there was some sensation of pain at leaving the old life. It meant good-by to so many things—to the pretty cottage, to the bonny woods, to the rushing river, to St. Byno’s, to stern, silent Aunt Alice, who, despite her severity, had a tender spot in her heart which Violet had never quite reached. It meant good-by to the dreams and visions of girlhood about which there had been a fragrance sweeter than that which hung about this present hour.

In short, although she admired her lover, and thought him almost perfection, although she liked him very much, and the prospect of a life spent with him was pleasant to her, although she had promised to marry him, she was far from passionately in love with him. He had hoped to waken her heart from its childlike sleep ; he had stirred it, but had not roused it to life.

There seemed nothing wanting to her, as she dressed for the simple ceremony that was to take place at the parish church of St. Byno’s. Of the many weddings that had taken place in the old church, none had been quieter or simpler than this. Indeed, no one seemed to know there was a wedding. As a rule, when any one was married, the inhabitants of St. Byno’s flocked to see the ceremony. But

on this occasion the church was empty. No little crowd, with wandering eyes, stood round the old stone porch ; the bells that had rung for the marriages and deaths of so many generations were silent now.

The young lover, thinking of his darling's fine lace veil and dainty dress, had insisted upon a carriage—not from "The Barley Mow" at St. Byno's, but from "The Ratcliffe Arms" at Carrington; then the people of St. Byno's would know nothing of it. That was the last "straw" to Miss Atherton; a veil and wreath had been enough, but a carriage was more than she felt she could bear.

Miss Atherton declared that she had a keen sense of the fitness of things, and that, for the orphan daughter of a poor doctor, a veil, a wreath, and a carriage were absurd. In fact, such things belonged to the order she detested, the aristocrats; and she would have none of them.

"But," said the young lover, "how could my beautiful bride walk through the fields and the high-road in a dainty wedding-dress, which would be caught by the brambles and thorns?"

Miss Atherton's sense of economy came to her aid. The dress being expensive and beautiful, it certainly would be foolish to allow it to trail over the grass and the dying leaves.

So the carriage came from "The Ratcliffe Arms" at Carrington, and the wedding-party, consisting of Lord Ryvers, Violet, and Miss Atherton, drove to church.

"To think," said Miss Atherton, "that at my age I should be present at a wedding—I, who have protested against love and marriage all these years."

Her manner was a protest still, for nothing could have been more grim and stern.

The Reverend Maurice Thorn, to whom both aunt and niece were well known, looked in astonishment at the wedding-party. But Miss Atherton herself knew only too well the secret of her presence there. She had come that with her own eyes she might see every precaution taken as to the validity of Violet's marriage.

One of Miss Atherton's fixed ideas was that, sooner or later, every man grew tired of his wife, and would be glad to free himself from her in any way he could. This she was quite determined the young artist should never do, if by any means she could prevent it. He was taking her

niece away, just as she had grown not merely a useful, but pleasant companion. He should not have it in his power to leave her when he was tired of her.

Lord Ryvers had felt embarrassed about his name. One day, when they were speaking on the subject, he had told Violet that his name was Rand lph. She had thought it odd that he should be called Randolph Randolph ; still many people had the same Christian name as surname ; and she had scarcely given another thought to the matter until there had been a question packing and directing her trunks, when she had blushed and laughed to see her name—"Mrs. Randolph"—in great letters.

Lord Ryvers was no less anxious than Miss Atherton that everything should be perfectly legal and in order, even to the name. He gave it boldly as "Randolph Ryvers Randolph," no one paying any attention to the intermediate name. Miss Atherton heard it when the minister asked, "Randolph Ryvers Randolph, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?" but it did not strike her as being in any way peculiar, nor did she think any further of the matter.

There had been no preparations for a wedding-breakfast Miss Atherton would not hear of any ; but Lord Ryvers had seen tears in Violet's eyes, and had acted in accordance with what he believed to be her wish.

"I cannot imagine any one married without a wedding-cake," Violet had said, piteously.

To marry without money or love might be a venial offence, but without a wedding-cake was not to be dreamed of. The eager young lover sent off to London and ordered a bride-cake.

It was a necessity that they should return to the cottage after the ceremony ; even Miss Atherton owned, with a snap that almost annihilated Lord Ryvers for a time, that Violet could not start for the Continent in a veil and wreath.

"I never intended her to enter my doors after she was married," said Miss Atherton ; "but in this case it cannot be helped."

To her surprise, when they reached home, the table in the pretty little parlor was set, decorated with beautiful flowers, the bride-cake being placed in the middle between —worst of all!—two bottles of champagne.

Lord Ryvers was amused at her frankly expressed horror. He thought, and thought justly, that this was one of the most original of weddings. There was no kiss, no caress, no wishing of happiness or joy ; not that that mattered, for he was in an elysium of love and Violet in a maze of delight. She laughed when Miss Atherton looked at the table, and, uplifting her hands, cried :

"Bride-cake and champagne in my house ! "

"They generally accompany love and marriage," said Lord Ryvers.

"They generally accompany extravagance and ruin !" cried Miss Atherton, and she steadfastly refused to touch one drop of the sparkling wine.

"This is my first glass of champagne," said Violet, "I have often thought how delicious it must be, but have never tasted it."

"I hope your life will be as clear, shining, and bright as the wine in your glass," cried the young husband.

Miss Atherton gazed solemnly at her.

"I hope it will be your last, Violet. You have married an extravagant man, who will never rest until he has ruined himself. I hope you will have more sense than to fall in with his absurd notions."

"I shall try my best to be sensible, aunt," replied the fair young bride.

She could laugh now that she would soon be away, but Miss Atherton's coldness and sharp-biting tongue had always been a great trouble to her. The beautiful face of the young bride on her wedding-morning was pale as a white rose. The novelty, the bright life before her, were delightful, but she missed what enhances the happiness of most girls—a mother's kiss and a father's cheery blessing.

When the obnoxious champagne was finished, and some little inroad had been made into the bride-cake, it was time to go. Lord Ryvers had detained the carriage that they might drive to Carrington railway station. When Miss Atherton heard that, she subsided into stony silence ; no other words were needed or used.

"The end of all this extravagance must come," she repeated to herself again and again ; "those people who would sleep upon roses must feel the thorns"—seeming to derive great satisfaction from the thought.

The moment came in which aunt and niece bade each

other farewell ; and then Violet looked into the stern, cold face with weeping eyes.

" Give me one kind word, one kind wish aunt," she said. " It seems cruel that I should leave what has been my home without one kind word."

" You have pleased yourself; you have married in defiance of my wishes, you have married a man who seems to think extravagance a virtue. I have a few words for you—words of prophecy—that you will find thorns, sharp and long, in your orange-blossoms."

Years afterward the words returned to Violet's mind, and she knew that they indeed had been prophetic.

Lord Ryvers overheard them and hastened to her. It was useless now for Miss Atherton to look horrified or turn aside. He took Violet in his arms before her very eyes and kissed her. She was his wife, and no one could interfere.

" Do not listen, darling," he cried ; " there is not one single thorn in your beautiful orange-blossoms, and, if there were, I would take it away. If Aunt Alice cannot say good-by to you kindly, we will leave her without."

Miss Atherton did not yield ; she was firm to the last ; and they parted from her without even the semblance of a good wish.

" She will come back to me yet," was her comment, as the carriage drove away ; " and then—then I shall see the thorns amid the orange-blossoms."

But, when they had gone, when the last sound of the carriage-wheels had died away, and no echo came of the horses' feet, then the blighted, imbibited heart bled. Oh, why had Heaven been so good to this girl, fair of face, and so cruel to her ? Why had love been sent to her as a fever of pain, as a madness of misery ? Yet to this girl it was a golden dream of happiness, realized for the present, even if it ended in the blackness and bitterness of death. She paced up and down the garden paths, by which the holly hocks grew, and her whole soul revolted against the decree of Heaven. Why was she old, worn, and haggard ? Why had she no fond husband, no sweet children ? Why had she missed all that was fair and pleasant in life ? The old pain and passion that had once slept awoke with bitter clamor, bitter anguish.

" Why is it ?" she cried, with clasped hands and upraised eyes. " Why is it ? Merciful Heavens ! Why the cross

for me and the crown for her? Why for me the bitterness of gall, for her the sweetness of honey? Why for her the wine of life, for me the lees?"—forgetting that there are secrets that will be known only when the whole of life lies bare before us, that life of which we now see only a part.

Meanwhile, the happy bride and bridegroom had left care and trouble behind. The day was glorious, the bride beautiful and well content, if not in raptures, the bridegroom beside himself with delight. He was so deeply, so utterly in love himself that he did not observe any deficiency in her.

That she was delighted, smiled at all she saw, enjoyed everything with such sweet simplicity, seemed enough to him. A man who is dazzled by the light of the sun does not see the faint light of a star. He was so dazed with his own love, "so mighty, so pure, and true," that he did not see any deficiency in hers.

He thought himself the most fortunate man in the world that he had won so fair and innocent a bride. He knew that in his sphere the rule was to marry for money, rank, or position, but seldom for love. He remembered how often he had laughed at barefaced angling for a coronet, and how with his laughter had been mingled contempt. He had seen some of the fairest girls in England led to the altar by men who were not worthy to touch even the hem of their garments; yet, their vices and sins being well gilded, no one ever resented them. He remembered this, and congratulated himself that his marriage would be one of a thousand; he was married for himself, for love, married to one who not only was ignorant of his claim to birth and fortune, but actually detested both, and would not knowingly have married an aristocrat—would not have married him had she known who he really was, for the teachings of Miss Atherton had sunk deeply into the heart and mind of her niece.

The happy young bridegroom listened with a smile on his lips to Violet's denunciations of the aristocracy. How little she dreamed that she was speaking to a representative man of the very class she abhorred!

He was young, and the world lay bright before him. He never thought of the day in which she would learn the truth, and perhaps resent having had such deception practiced upon her. He did not look beyond the happy present, this beautiful wedding-morn, the honeymoon that was

never to end, with the never-ceasing melody of its sweet love-story.

He was too young to anticipate trouble ; and he began his married life as blithely as if he had not had the proudest woman in England for his mother, and the most thorough hater of all aristocrats for his wife.

CHAPTER XII.

NEVER did life open so fairly. Lord Ryvers had taken his beautiful young wife direct to Paris ; he knew that everything there would be a novelty to her—hotel life perhaps the greatest of all. He had taken her at once to Meurice's, and Violet was a much astonished as he had expected her to be.

On the morning after their arrival he asked her what she should like best to see—park, palace, places of historic interest, cathedrals, grand old shrines—what should it be ? And she looked with wonder and interest in her beautiful eyes.

"Take me first to the site of the old Bastile," she said, "and to the streets where, in the time of the first Revolution, the blood of the people ran like rivers."

The words struck him as being very forcible ; but he yielded at once. She was a bride of twenty-four hours, and her least wish was sovereign law.

"Would you not like best to see the Tuilleries, the Bois de Boulogne, or the grand old Cathedral of Notre Dame ? "

"No ; I prefer what I said. I should like to see the site of the grim old Bastile. My aunt gave me the 'History of the Old Bastile' to read and I have shed many tears over it. Ah, what days they were ! I think that, if ever 'God arose in history,' it was at the time of the French Revolution, when the voice of the people found hearing, and their 'wills worked woe.' "

"What a fierce democrat you are, Violet !" he said, laughingly. "I should think you are the first bride who has made such a curious choice."

"Other brides have probably had a different training," she rejoined. "They have been taught to admire what I have been taught to hate. I must say that Aunt Alice has succeeded perfectly well in imbuing my mind with her own ideas."

Lord Ryvers laughed; but there was something in the sound of his laughter which suggested uneasiness.

"I believe it is a mere theory on your part, Violet," he said. "I am sure if a handsome young earl or marquis had asked you to marry him, and you had loved him, you would not have refused him simply because he was an aristocrat: now, would you?"

"Yes," she replied, after a few moments' silence, "I would. I would have refused him, even if my refusal had broken my heart. But then, you see, Randolph, I could never have loved an aristocrat; my own instinct would have been all against him. And she wondered why a shadow fell over the face of her young husband. "I detest selfishness and self-indulgence, and those are the two great characteristics of the aristocracy. My own instinct could keep me from loving a selfish man."

"I do not think you judge fairly, Violet," he said. "I grant that among the aristocracy there are selfish, self-indulgent men and idle, useless women, perhaps worse; but I must say this also, that the finest, bravest, noblest men in the world are to be found in the ranks of the British aristocracy, where you may find also the grandest of women."

She looked at him with a half-pitying smile.

"You do not know, Randolph; you have not been told so much about them as I have." Then her beautiful face brightened with laughter. "Do you know," she said, "that you are not agreeing with me? That will never do. We must love and dislike the same things. If I cry, '*A bas les aristocrates!*' you must repeat the words."

She wondered why his face darkened. He knew that in uttering those words she condemned mother, sisters, relatives, and himself.

"You will not repeat it?" she cried. "Ah, well, in time when I have told you all the things my aunt has told me, you will think as I do!"

For a moment a sudden deadly fear came over him. What if, when his secret were known to her, and she found that she had married one of the race she hated—what if she resented it, and ceased to love him? He turned to his young wife, whose exquisite face glowed with the fervor of her own words.

"I wish, Violet," he said, "that I could persuade you to be more tolerant. I do not see, even if there must be a dif-

ference between classes, that there need be such bitter prejudice, such hatred."

"I do," she replied resolutely. "It is because the vices of one class demand it. It seems to me, in reviewing the history of the world, that there has always been a class set aside who have demanded the wealth and the services of their fellow men as a right, even from the very olden times down to these, when an Irish landlord racks his tenants for rent and spends the money in England."

He looked at her with new alarm in his face, such alarm as would at any other time have made her laugh.

"Why, this is worse than ever, Violet! I hope you will not turn out to be a Fenian and a Home-Ruler, as well as a perfect democrat."

"I am not quite sure if I understand the term rightly," she said; "but"—and she gave him a most loving glance—"I hope I shall always be a Home-Ruler in the proper sense of the word."

The beautiful eyes were so eloquent, the smile seemed to mean so many things, that he forgot everything else for a time but his love for her.

He took her wherever she asked to go. He showed her the sight of the old Bastile, where so many hundreds of innocent people had undergone all the tortures of long imprisonment and death; but he showed her also the grand old Abbey of St. Dennis, where sleep the most chivalrous race of men—the Kings of France. He showed her all the trophies and monuments of the people; he also made her examine all the ancient glories of royalty spread over Paris. If she saw one side, he said to himself, she should see the other.

But her heart turned invariably from the trophies of kings to the annals of the people.

"I wonder," she said to him one day, with a thoughtful face—"I wonder, Randolph, when the great difference between man and man began. They must have been equal for many years."

"I do not know," he replied; "I hardly think so. I should imagine that, so soon as men began to understand one another, the strongest and wisest began to rule the others."

"I can understand that," she said, her face brightening. "I could yield reverence to an aristocracy of strength or

virtue. I object to an aristocracy whose claim consists only in birth or wealth. No man has the ruling of where he shall be born, in what class. Why, therefore, should he be either despised if he be lowly, or exalted if he be what the world calls great?"

So she puzzled him at times by questions that amused him by their simplicity, and again with questions that he could neither like nor answer.

But in the meantime he tried to educate her, to incline her to what he considered a more just and impartial mode of thought. He found that, right or wrong, Violet was perfectly consistent. Any revelations of courage, of nobility of character in one of the people, would draw forth expressions of admiration from her, just as the sight of a crest or a coronet would draw from her derision and scorn. By degrees these things forced themselves on his mind, and he stood appalled. He said to himself that before he told her his secret he must bind her heart to his so closely, so tightly, that nothing could ever detach it—so firmly that aer prejudices would all die in the light of her love.

That evening as they sat in one of the beautiful saloons that look over the gardens of the Tuileries, Violet sung to him, and this was the song she chose :

"I wonder where we two shall meet,
I wonder if old love still lives,
If years must pass ere one forgets,
If years must pass ere one forgives;
If fate will lead our footsteps on
Until the waiting hours be past,
When Truth shall lend her golden light
And heart shall beat for heart at last!
Sometimes, sometimes thus I wonder,
Love—I cannot tell you why.
Once we loved long ago;
That may be the reason
Love must waken by and by.

"I wonder where your life is passed,
Or if in sun or if in shade,
If time has flown on silver wing,
Or brought the flowers that bloom and fade.
If you, like me, can still hope on,
Believing we shall live again,
Forgetting all the parted years,
When pain was bliss and bliss was pain?

Sometimes, sometimes thus I wonder,
Love—I cannot tell you why.
Once we loved long ago;
That may be the reason
Love must waken by and by."

"A sweet song and a sad song," said Lord Ryvers—"not a song that suits me. Come here, Violet!"

"Here" meant to the balcony, from which they could see the grand old palace where kings and queens had reigned, suffered, and enjoyed, the grand old trees that stood serene and calm, although the kings that had once admired them had died in exile, and the queens who had loitered under their shade had laid their heads on the block.

The moon was shining bright as day.

"Why not sing to me," he cried, passionately, "of happy love—love perfected as is ours?"

"Is it perfected?" she asked. "I read yesterday that love is made perfect by suffering. If that be true, our love, Randolph, is far from being perfect yet."

"If that be true, may it never be perfect!" he said. "I would rather never have love than win it through suffering."

In after years the words came back to him and to her—to her, in the brightness of daylight and in the silence of night.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME months had passed since the marriage in the little church at St. Byno's, and the young lord was, if possible, more in love with his wife than ever. She had grown more beautiful, because the character of her beauty was more refined. Lord Ryvers himself was one of the most refined of men. Constant association with him had given a grace and courtesy to her manner that nothing else could have given. When Lord Ryvers had first met Violet at St. Byno's she had been quick and clever in an extraordinary degree, but her education had been a simple one. Since that time she had read a great deal, and Lord Ryvers had been most careful in his selection of books for her.

"You must read what every one else reads," he said to her one day. "So many quotations from and allusions to favorite books are made in society, that one must be

pretty well educated and well read even to follow the conversation."

"I like the reading," Violet said, laughing; "but why do you prepare me as though it would be my fate to mix with so many clever people?"

"It will be your fate at some future time," he replied.

"Do you consider all artists clever?" she asked quickly.

"They should be," he answered, "or they will make very poor artists."

Lord Ryvers was very proud of his young wife. He had not dared purchase such a wardrobe as he desired for her, fearing that by so doing her suspicions would be excited, but he had insisted on her wearing beautiful dresses; and, although she had cried out against the extravagance, she was pleased with his purchases, and enjoyed wearing her exquisite costumes.

One evening, when they were going out, he had looked at her with a most comprehensive glance—from the golden head to the little shapely foot.

"You ought to wear white silk, white lace, and pearls, Violet," he said; "nothing else would suit your style so well."

"Had you not better suggest diamonds and satin?" she rejoined, laughing merrily. "You must have a curious idea of what is suitable for the dress of artists' wives, Randolph."

"I know how you ought to look, and how you shall look," declared her husband.

"Randolph," she said, seriously, "you never seem to think of money."

"Money!" he replied. "Why should I, my dear?"

"Why should you?" she echoed, with a smile that he thought the most beautiful he had ever seen. "Why, the answer is plain enough! If we go on spending money as we have done, we shall soon have none left. Do you know," she added, looking up at him with laughing eyes, "that we have the best of everything!"

"So we ought," cried Lord Ryvers. "Do not trouble about money. I was not so deeply engrossed with my art that I forgot to lay by for a rainy day."

"And are these the rainy days?" she asked.

"I hope they are the darkest we shall ever see," he replied.

He was, if possible, more in love with her than when he first met her in the woods of St. Byno's. She had a wonderful charm for him. The ladies of his family had always affected to be, if they were not actually, delicate and fragile ; they considered health and strength rather as vulgar attributes. Violet, on the contrary, rejoiced in superb health, in a magnificent constitution ; she did not even know what the words " languor " and " fatigue " meant as applied to herself, and consequently she had a capacity for enjoyment that seemed marvelous to him. When they were in Switzerland, she could climb the highest mountains quite as well as he could, she could walk as far, she could endure as much fatigue—yet she was refined, and as far from being masculine or strong-minded as it was possible to be. There was no fairer picture than that of this beautiful girl—health glowing in her face, her eyes sparkling, her lips crimson. It was the possession of such perfect health, or unflagging gayety and high spirit, that had such a wonderful attraction for Lord Ryvers.

They had spent the whole of the year in traveling ; they had been through Italy and Switzerland. Now a fancy had taken Lord Ryvers—he must go to the Rhine—not in the beaten tracks where British tourists abound—no, he would seek some pretty sequestered spot where river and mountain were at their best. He would stay there for some months, have his beautiful Violet all to himself for that time, and then arrange for the future.

He felt that he should not be afraid of his mother meeting his wife, now that this year of travel and study had refined and perfected her. He would be proud when the hour came for even Lady Ryvers to see her. It was true that Violet was different from most of the ladies who were his mother's friends and associates ; but she had a characteristic beauty and grace and individuality of her own.

Lord Ryvers found that of which he was in quest in the pretty little town of Saltzberg, on the Rhine, perhaps one of the most picturesque on that beautiful river. It stands where the river is widest, and where the great crags rise highest to the sky ; every beauty of land and water, of hill and dale, of river and ruin are there.

A little tributary called the Saltz runs into the Rhine at this spot, and the scene where the two currents meet is one of the prettiest and most picturesque on the river.

The Saltz is spanned by an old rustic bridge built over the narrowest part of the river; great trees shade the bridge at each end, and the gray stone of which it is built is half covered with ivy and moss. The town stands between the hills and the river.

Lord Ryvers chose one of the pretty villas situated in the outskirts. It was built on a portion of the rock that jutted over the river. From the windows one saw nothing in the front of the house but the rapid rolling Rhine. The picturesque, weird beauty of the spot delighted him.

They were standing on the bridge one morning, when the young husband turned to his wife :

"I ask nothing better from life than this," he said. "I should like to live here always with you, the blue sky always above my head, the sound of the river always in my ears, and your face before my eyes."

She laid both her white hands on his shoulder and looked steadfastly into his face.

"Would such a life fill you with content, Randolph?" she asked.

"Yes, with infinite content," he replied.

"It would not satisfy me," she said, decidedly. "I would rather live in the world of men and women."

"This is far more beautiful," he declared, dreamily.

"But beauty is not the end and aim of life," she said. "I begin to think you are a dreamer, after all."

"I am content to be one while I have you to dream about," he rejoined.

But there was no response on the beautiful young face looking over the water.

"Randolph, you have no ambition," she said, suddenly.

"Yet ours has always been considered an ambitious race," he replied as quickly; and she looked up at him with a satirical laugh.

"Your race!" she repeated. "Do you mean the artistic race?"

His face flushed and his eyes clouded as he answered:

"Yes, of course, the artistic race. What else should I mean?"

And again the little ripple of sunny laughter jarred upon him as she replied :

"You spoke like an aristocrat, as though you belonged to some race quite separate and distinct from all others."

"How you hate all aristocrats!" he said, with a deep sigh.

"I do indeed," she replied; and then she pointed to an old ruin standing at the foot of the hill. "Have you heard the legend of the old castle there?" she asked, carelessly. "I read it this morning."

"No. Tell it to me," he said. "I like your way of telling a story, Violet; it is terse and vigorous."

"It is not much of a legend," she said, "but it interested me. A German baron married a young French lady, and brought her home to this castle, Heaven knows how many hundred years ago. When he had been married some time, he found out that she had a secret in her life. No one ever knew what that secret was; she never told it; and he threatened that, if she did not tell him, he would kill her. Do you think a wife has no right to keep a secret from her husband, Randolph?"

"I should think not," he replied; but he spoke in such a tone of hesitation that she looked at him again, half laughing.

"Has a husband any right to keep a secret from his wife?" she asked then; and this time he answered more quickly:

"No."

"What do you think this cruel husband did, Randolph?" she continued. "When he found his wife would not tell him her secret, he flung her from that old ruined tower into the Rhine; and the story tells how she haunted the tower until no one dared live in it, and so it fell into ruin. The moral of the story is—there should be no secret between husband and wife."

But Randolph did not answer with the cordiality Violet expected.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT struck Lord Ryvers, for the first time since his marriage, that the beautiful wife he had won from the woodlands of St. Byno's did not love him with quite the same devoted affection he had for her. He would have been content to have remained with her forever; he asked nothing better than to live always with her in the weird villa overlooking the Rhine; he wanted no other society, no

other world—heart, brain and soul would have been quite content.

Not so with her. It was with something of dismay that she found her husband quite willing to live at the solitary villa. It was beautiful enough—she did not attempt to deny that; but to her richly gifted, vivacious nature, to her ardent mind and soul, there was not sufficient in this worship of nature; she wanted more life, more to amuse her, than the contemplation of magnificent scenery. Lord Ryvers was of a contemplative nature; his young wife rejoined in a more active disposition. She liked to tread frequented paths of life, he the by-paths. She liked to be always doing, he to be always thinking.

He was thinking very seriously one morning, as he stood in his favorite spot, the pretty rustic bridge over the Saltz, the river foaming and fretting beneath, the green boughs spreading above, the blue sky over all. He had been thinking, first of all, that he would paint such a picture as would set the whole world on fire with admiration—just this bridge, with the deep foaming river beneath, the tall trees with their great boughs, and the beautiful figure of his wife standing beneath them, just as he had seen her stand hundred of times, with a rapt expression of admiration on her face. If he could paint her as he had seen her, if he could catch the brilliant coloring, the lovely lights and shades always flitting over her face, if he could catch that superb poise of the head, and grave, proud bearing of the figure, he would call his picture “The Queen of the Rhine,” and men should bow down in homage to the exquisite face whose beauty now was known only to him. The more he thought of it, the more he became possessed of the idea. Even his lady-mother, who sneered at pictures and haughtily patronized art—even she should acknowledge that it was a *chef-d'œuvre*.

And the thought of Lady Ryvers brought many other things to his mind.

He had lost himself of late in a dream of happiness; he had almost forgotten the responsibilities of life—that he was heavily weighted by fortune, that he had all the responsibilities of title, position, rank, and money. They had always been a tie and a burden to him, whose life had been more or less engrossed by art. If by some good chance he had been born an artist, he would have been a

good and happy one ; born in a high sphere, his art career was in some degrees spoiled. His vast fortune entailed many duties upon him, and they were not altogether to his taste. The one thing he had dreaded all his life he had most successfully avoided—he had not married for money. To his romantic, poetical mind and temperament there was no idea so horrible as that of marrying for money ; it was death to all sentiment and romance, death to all that he valued most in this world.

Thank Heaven, he had avoided that ! The girl he had found loved him for himself, and was perfectly ignorant of the fact that he had money ; indeed, with her passionate hatred of the rich and noble, she would never have married him had she known exactly what he was. They had been married nearly nine months, and the conclusion he came to was this—that his fair young wife did not love him with the same passionate and devoted affection that he gave to her. He must win it ; that was all.

These thoughts came to him as he stood on the bridge. That same morning he had received a letter from his mother which had startled him and brought him face to face with the sterner realities of life.

Lady Ryvers had reminded him that his birthday fell on the 22d of June, and that on that day he came of age. It would soon be at hand, and she wished to know his intentions. Of course he would return. He must be at Ryverswell. Relatives, friends, neighbors, tenants, and dependents, must be all gathered round him ; there must be balls, dinners, entertainments of various kinds ; in fact, he must do his duty, and his duty just then would consist in feasting everybody. It was, so his mother said, the most important day of his life ; much would be expected from him. She hoped that nothing would interfere with his return.

Lady Ryvers reminded him that she had agreed to the sketching-tour very much against her conscience, and hoped that he would now abandon a pursuit that had always been most distasteful to her. She trusted that he would give himself up to the duties of his position, which were onerous enough. Lady Ryvers added that she earnestly hoped that he would also give his attention to marriage, the next great step in his life, a step that would either make or mar him.

"A step I have taken without consulting any one or anything, except my own heart," he thought. Yet there were some very disagreeable facts to face, and the young man grew thoughtful as he bent over the foaming river. He had married to please himself, he had carried out the romantic idea of his life; but now difficulties seemed to surround him. He did not know at all how his wife would take the revelation of his secret, and he did not know what his mother would say when she found out the story of his marriage. She had always insisted so much on his marrying well. How to reconcile these opposite forces he did not know. The realities of life were pressing him now, the sweet dream of love and art must come to an end—but not yet—not just yet.

He determined to write to his lady-mother, and tell her that he found it quite impossible to break off his art-studies just at present, and that the festivities attending his coming of age must be deferred for another year. His mother would be able to make all needful arrangements, and he would certainly return at the time specified.

"I am glad you are going to work again, Randolph," said Violet, when he told her of his picture, "The Queen of the Rhine." "I will stand on the bridge, like the man in the song, as many hours as you wish. I have thought once or twice that you were inclined to rest on your laurels; indeed, Randolph, the truth is, you have done nothing lately but love and care for me."

"Certainly it has been my chief pleasure as well as my chief occupation," he replied, gallantly.

"Yes; but it does not bring grist to the mill. See how you worked at St. Byno's; you were always painting there."

"Dreaming is working with me," he replied. "Do you think all those long hours spent in watching the lights and shadows, the sky and the river, the rocks and the ruins, are wasted? Ah, no! I am storing beautiful pictures in my mind. An artist studies nature as a student studies books. I do not think a man with an artistic mind is ever idle; thoughts and fancies are always passing through his brain."

Violet kept her word. She was ready at all times to stand on the bridge, just in the attitude he wished to paint her, and "The Queen of the Rhine" made great progress. She won one promise from him, and it was that, when t

picture was finished, he would send it at once to England, and they should leave the villa on the Rhine.

"I do not want to go to England yet," he said. "You have no especial reason for desiring to go there?"

"None," she answered, carelessly, "unless it be to see Aunt Alice. I do not care to go to England; but I do not wish to remain here. I am just a little tired of solitude." And the glorious violet eyes flashed with the light of longing.

"Solitude?" repeated the young husband. "You do not call being with me 'solitude'?"

"It would be perfect solitude but for you," she replied, laughingly. "Of course, with you it is bearable. I want to see more, I want real life. I want to see the faces of strange men and women, to find myself sometimes in a crowd. At times I think it will be pleasant to have a little home in England, where you can paint all day and I can keep house. I am a famous housekeeper, Randolph, although you have never given me a chance of showing you what I can do in that line. Aunt Alice gave me a good training. We have been nearly a year wandering in search of the beautiful and picturesque; now let us see a little more of humanity. Why do you not go to some large city? We should be able to study our fellow-beings there."

"I do not want to see English people," he replied; "and in every great European city they abound."

Violet looked up at him quickly.

"Why do you not wish to meet English people?" she asked. "I have noticed your avoidance of our countrymen before, but I could never understand your reason for it."

"British tourists are not to my taste," he replied.

"Why, Randolph, what nonsense!" Violet exclaimed, laughing. "We are British tourists ourselves, are we not?"

"Not of the ordinary kind," he replied, carelessly.

"We are ordinary people," said his wife, proudly. "I should not like to think myself different from others."

"You will allow me some little prerogative," he said. "I cannot bring myself to think of myself as an ordinary person; will you not allow me the privilege at least of genius?"

"Perhaps I may; but, Randolph, there are times when I cannot help thinking, although you hide it from me, that you are an aristocrat at heart. There—you have grown quite pale at the mere suggestion!"

"And no wonder," he replied; "that is a terrible accusation to bring against me, when one considers how you hate aristocrats."

"That indeed I do, thanks to Aunt Alice. I think class hatred is one of the strongest of all hates;" and she raised her head proudly. "But that is not the question. I want you to promise me that when 'The Queen of the Rhine' is finished you will give up solitude for a time, and live where we can see men and women, instead of rocks and rivers."

He was looking at her with serious intent.

"What are you thinking of, Randolph?" she asked.

"I was wondering if the time would ever come when you and I would think the same, Violet," he said, musingly.

"It will be the same with us as it is with other people," she answered.

"How is that?" he asked.

"The stronger nature will gain the ascendancy over the weaker one," she replied; "that is the case with all married people. Mind, I did not say the finer nature, but the stronger. If it be you, you will mold my ideas to your own; if it be I, I shall have the pleasure of molding yours. At present," she continued, "we are, I think, about equal; but we shall see which gains the ascendancy over the other as we go on."

And in after-times Lord Ryvers often thought of her words.

CHAPTER XV.

EVERY one knows the famous city of St. Philipo, standing as it does on the shores of the Mediterranean. St. Philipo contains the finest old churches, the finest pictures, and the finest sculptures in Italy. It is a city of buried treasures; people are always making discoveries there. Now it is a hidden gem of Botticelli or a half-finished statue unmistakably by Michael Angelo; then a Titian hanging unknown for years in the corner of some house half buried in vine-leaves; then a faint, fair sketch of Fra Angelico. St. Philipo has always been the home of art and of artists, for it is one of the loveliest spots in the wide world.

The city is small in itself, and it slopes down to the border of the sea. Artists say that nowhere else are colors

so beautiful to be seen. The sea forms a little bay, known as the Bay of St. Philipo, and the water there is as blue as the sky itself—a lovely transparent blue. The waves seldom roll in there; it must be a strong wind indeed that lashes those wavelets into foam. Little pink shells half cover the golden sands. Green masses of foliage seem to surround the bay; and on the gray cliffs stand houses that are each one a picture in itself, some white, some red, some gray, the roofs of some covered with moss and lichen. Flowers grow in wondrous profusion in this grand old city, so sheltered from wind and cold—roses, lilies, verbenas, gladioli, the lemon, orange, and myrtle—and the vine finds its home everywhere. The birds begin to sing and to build there before they favor any other spot. Every breath of wind that blows in St. Philipo is laden with perfume; and the honey made by the busy bees, and sold by the peasants, is sweeter than any other.

No very rich people reside in the city; nor does any one work very hard. The poorest part of the population live by fishing and by the sale of honey and flowers. Most of the shops are filled with old curiosities—rare treasures in the shape of old chain, old carvings, and pictures. And those who are above work and want live in the beautiful villas dotted over the cliffs and the hills. The modern spirit of adventure invades every spot. It has reached St. Philipo at last; and in the midst of a tangle of vine and myrtle a large hotel has been erected entirely on model principles. An Englishman started it, and it has become a success, for, though St. Philipo is not much in the way of tourists, artists go there, rich men in search of antiquities and curiosities, and, at times, travelers in search of the picturesque.

Thither Lord Ryvers went with his wife. He had half thought of flight when he heard that an English family was staying at the hotel. It was bad enough to have an English landlord; but to live in the same house with an English family was, in his present mood, most distasteful to him.

He had grown somewhat nervous and frightened with regard to his secret; and he dreaded Violet's discovering it. He could not tell how she would take it, or what she would do, and he wanted to defer what he considered an evil day as long as he could. He avoided English people as much

as possible, lest he should meet any one who knew him. He asked for the name of the family staying at the hotel, and was told that the entry in the visitor's book was " Robert Carstone, Esq., of Ingleshaw, Mrs. Carstone, and Oscar Carstone, Esq."

" Rolling in money," said the hotel-keeper to Lord Ryvers, " all made from malt and corn. Mr. Carstone is here to buy antiquities."

This description set the young lord's mind at ease. He—Lord Ryvers of Ryverswell—was not likely to be known to any retired corn-factor.

For some days the visitors saw nothing of each other, much to Violet's disappointment. At times she was almost indignant with Randolph because he avoided the Carstones. When he pleaded his distaste for English society, she would say :

" Oh, yes, it is all very well for you, Randolph; you have mixed with the world all your life! I have never really known any one except Aunt Alice, and I long to know what the others are like."

The opportunity came at last.

There was a *fête* in the grand old city; the churches, the palaces, the shops and streets, the villas dotted on the hillside, were all to be illuminated, and the fireworks were to be on a magnificent scale.

" Oh, Randolph," cried his young wife, " do let me see them! We never had any at St. Byno's. Mr. Bret, the landlord, says the finest place to see them is from the balcony of the hotel, and he has asked me to go there. Randolph, do say ' Yes.' "

" You will be sure to meet those English people there," he said, half reluctantly; but she looked so imploring that he could not refuse her.

" Will you come, Randolph?" she asked.

And he answered " No," at which she felt relieved, for it would give her a chance of talking to the English people.

In all St. Philipo there was no more beautiful picture than Violet in the balcony that evening. She wore a cool dress of white that fitted her tall, exquisite figure to perfection. Over that, and over her golden head, she had draped a black lace mantilla, and she wore a spray of her favorite flower, the orange-blossom.

The golden stars were throbbing in the blue sky; the

waters of the bay were so calm that each star was reflected in them ; the night wind was faint with perfume.

Presently some one else entered the balcony, and passed Violet with a profound bow—a tall, manly figure, with broad shoulders and a broad chest. She looked at him with some admiration ; she could not see him plainly by the light of the stars—a tall, straight figure, a well-shaped head with clusters of brown hair, large gray eyes, a face clear-cut as a cameo, intelligent and expressive. He went to the other end of the balcony and stood looking over the deep silent waters of the bay.

"That must be Oscar Carstone," thought Violet—"a typical Englishman, tall, strong, and fair."

Then came a lady, stout and comely, richly dressed in a grand brocade that rustled with every movement ; jewels shone on her neck and fingers.

She took a seat in the balcony, and Violet remarked that she had a kind, shrewd face, piercing dark eyes, dark hair fashionably arranged ; yet, in spite of the brocade and the diamonds, the word "plebeian" was written on the stout, comely person. She, in her turn, looked at Violet's exquisite face and figure ; then suddenly she rose and went to where she was standing. She made a very condescending bow, and looked into the lustrous eyes.

"We must dispense with introductions," she said, with a broad smile, "as there is no one to perform that ceremony for us. It seems such a pity to sit and watch this beautiful scene without speaking."

Violet made a bow that would have befitted a queen.

"You are very kind," she said.

And Mrs. Carstone looked up in wonder, both at the loveliness of the face and sweetness of the voice.

"I am Mrs. Carstone," she said. "I am staying here with my husband and son. We came to St. Philipo to purchase antiquities."

"And I," said Violet, "am staying here with my husband, Mr. Randolph, who came in search of the pictur-esque."

A shadow of disappointment passed over the comely face of the elder lady ; she had thought this girl, who looked like a young empress, would have proved to be "somebody of consequence."

"An artist, I suppose ?" she said, languidly.

"Yes," replied Violet, proudly; "my husband is an artist."

There was a light on her face and in her eyes. Mrs. Carstone saw that the young girl had a profound respect for the profession of her husband.

"Shall we go to the end of the balcony, Mrs. Randolph?" she said. "We shall see better there." Then, as they paused by the side of the young man, who was still standing there, she added, "My son Oscar," by the way of introduction.

So the three sat down together at the end of the balcony, the young man being already hopelessly in love with Violet's exquisite face.

"A beautiful scene," he said at length; "there is nothing approaching it to be found in England."

"Oh, Oscar, do not say that! There is no place like home." Mrs. Carstone had an occasional difficulty with her h's; but as a rule, she was fairly successful. "There is no place like home, Mrs. Randolph; and these fireworks, to my mind, will not compare with those so frequently to be seen at the Crystal Palace."

"Oh, mother," cried the son, with a sigh, "who would mention St. Philipo and the Crystal Palace in the same moment."

"My son is so sentimental," said the comely lady. "Give me comfort first—let everything else give place to that. Do you not think that a very good doctrine, Mrs. Randolph?"

"I like comfort," said Violet; "but there are many things I prefer to it."

The quick gray eyes turned upon her.

"No one could look at you, Mrs. Randolph, and believe that the doctrine of comfort is yours."

"What should you imagine my favorite doctrine to be?" asked Violet.

"Daring romance," he replied, after looking at her for a few minutes.

How she laughed! How she enjoyed it! He could not quite understand her laughter, though he rejoiced in it and thought he had caused it by his own wit.

"You are sentimental," she said at last. "In all my life I have known no romance."

But as she said the words there came to her a recollec-

tion of the hour in which she had stood before her ~~eager~~ young lover with the scarlet geraniums glowing on her breast. If that were not romance, it should have been. Her heart smote her and her face flushed. There was certainly everything conducive to romance in the circumstances of her marriage.

"Sentiment is one thing and sense another," said Mrs. Carstone; at which obvious platitude Violet laughed again. Oscar Carstone turned to her.

"Do you remember Moore's fine old ballad :

"Common sense and genius
One night went out a ramble?"

"Yes I remember it. I like it very much," she replied.

"Give me common sense!" said Mrs. Carstone.

"Give me genius!" cried her son; while Violet laughingly added :

"Give me a proper and judicious mixture of both!"

And the three deliverances were quite characteristic of the three people.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I AM a self-made man," said Robert Carstone, "and I am proud to own it. I have carved my own fate, as the poets say; I have made myself what I am."

And Violet's beautiful eyes were raised to his face with such a look of exultation that Lord Ryvers longed to see him fall from the terrace into the lake below.

"That is what I like, what I admire!" she cried, clasping her pretty white hands. "I think every man is noble who is the architect of his own fortunes," she continued. "That which we win for ourselves must be much better than that which is given to us by others."

Lord Ryvers looked up quietly, but with stern indignation in his face; he could not endure to hear such sentiments from those beautiful lips.

"Violet," he said, "would it not be better to talk about what you understand?"

Her face flushed at those, the first words of disapproval he had ever uttered to her.

Oscar had the ^{bad} taste to answer for her.

"I think Mrs. Randolph's ideas are perfectly just, and very generous."

The young heir of Ingleshaw felt indignant that "the artist" should contradict his sweet young wife, and on such a point, too.

"The artist" contented himself by giving Oscar a look that made him at least uncomfortable.

This little scene took place one evening when the two English families had met on the great terrace that overlooked the ornamental lake. Lord Ryvers' fear was realized—they had all grown intimate. Violet liked good-natured, comely Mrs. Carstone, and merely laughed at her patronage; it did not hurt her, but very often amused her. If Mrs. Carstone had been a lady of title, and had used the same patronizing manner to her, Violet would have rebelled hotly; but from the wife of that glorious piece of humanity, a self-made man, it did not come so much amiss. Mrs. Carstone had a vast amount of worldly knowledge, which to Violet, brought up, as it were, outside the world, was most attractive; and Lord Ryvers, after a few days, ceased to make any objection to the intimacy. It mattered but little, he thought; these people knew nothing of him, and were never likely to know anything. In all human probability, when they left the hotel, they would never meet again; and, if his beautiful Violet liked to go out with them and enjoy herself with them, he certainly would not object. Let her be happy in her own fashion; but he fervently hoped she would not expect him to care for them. It was now for the first time really that he saw the great gulf between himself and his wife. He had all the instincts, the prejudices, the strong likes and dislikes of his class; she had the same; hers being strengthened by the curious training she had received. It began to dawn upon him that he might as well try to change the color of her eyes or of her hair as to change the tone of her ideas and thoughts. What she thought admirable in these people—their rise from the ranks, the fact of their being "self-made"—seemed to him more or less contemptible.

"You cannot have such a thing as a self-made gentleman," he said to her one day, when they were arguing the point. "The very term is a contradiction."

"I do not see why," she replied.

"Because you will not, Violet. You are justness and

fairness itself on every other point but this one of class. A 'gentleman,' using the word in its true sense, is the result of generations of careful cultivation. A man may have gentlemanly instincts, yet not be a gentleman. The human race is, to say the least of it, quite as susceptible of cultivation as flowers. How much cultivation is required to change a weed into a flower?"

"Then I may suppose," said Violet, saucily, "that ordinary men are the weeds and gentlemen the flowers?"

"You exaggerate, my dear; but you must admit that generations of careful training, of cultivation, of refinement, must tell."

"They should; but I am not prepared to admit that it is so," she replied. "Randolph," she asked, suddenly, "in your own mind, do you call yourself a gentleman?"

All the hot blood of his grand old race flushed in his face, his eyes flashed fire, his strong white hands were clinched; then he restrained himself; he had not wooed her *en gentilhomme* and he owned himself caught in his own trap.

"I hope I am, Violet."

"You are not consistent, then," she declared, delighted at rousing him. "You tell me that a man can be a gentleman in the true sense of the word only when he belongs to an ancient and cultivated race. Now you claim for yourself the title of gentleman, yet you belong to no such race. You work for your living."

"Art ennobles all its followers," he replied loftily.

"Then you must have two kinds of gentlemen," she said.

"Violet," said her husband, gently, "come and kiss me. Your lips are so sweet and the dimples so charming that it is a waste of time for you to use them in argument. Kiss me, and do not let us argue again."

She did as he desired, and then laughed.

"That is a complete confession of defeat," she said; "nothing could be more complete. But we will not argue; we shall never agree on that point. Frankly, Randolph, I am a hundred times prouder because you can paint beautiful pictures than I should be if you were a nobleman."

"I quite believe it, Violet," he said, meekly, with a little wonder as to how it would end, and what terrible thing she would do when she knew the truth.

For some few days they did not argue again, and during

that time Violet had grown very intimate with the Carstones. On this evening they met on the terrace, and Lord Ryvers with difficulty concealed his distaste for their society.

"That young artist seems to give himself great airs," said Oscar Carstone, to his mother.

"Such people always do," replied the good lady, who rejoiced in platitudes, and knew as much of artists as she did of Arabs.

"I cannot think," said Oscar, "how he persuaded that beautiful girl to marry him."

"My dear, she is nobody," said Mrs. Carstone, in a tone of remonstrance.

"She might be somebody," replied the son. "If she were in London, she would soon be somebody. The professional beauties would all be outshone. I did not see a face in London like hers."

"She is a beautiful girl," allowed Mrs. Carstone.

Oscar looked very thoughtful.

"Mother," he said, "cultivate her; we have plenty of money, but no standing. Now, if we went to town, and could introduce a beautiful woman like Mrs. Randolph, we should become popular with her."

"I do not know whether she would let me introduce her," returned Mrs. Carstone; "although she is only an artist's wife, she is very proud."

"She would like it well enough," declared Oscar. "I am a good reader of character, and I understand her. Although her husband with his foolish notions about art, keeps her secluded, she loves the world and would enjoy it. It is true the husband would be a drawback. His manner is not to be compared with hers. In fact, I do not consider him well bred—he is too brusque."

"He is very high and mighty," said Mrs. Carstone. "I was talking to him yesterday, and saying how pleased your father would be to give him a commission for painting some good pictures for the gallery at Ingleshaw, and I was frightened. He looked at me savagely, as though he would bite me."

"I do not like him; but I like his wife," said Oscar; "and, if you want to attract London society, mother, ask her to visit you in town next year. She is no languid beauty either. How bright and animated she is! I saw

my father laugh this morning as he seldom laughs while she was talking to him."

So it happened that, after this brilliant suggestion of Oscar's that Mrs. Randolph should, by her beautiful face, open the gates of society to the family, Mrs. Carstone sought her more assiduously than ever. Seeing the young husband and wife on the terrace, she, with her son and husband, joined them. It was then, with a thumb in each arm hole of his waistcoat, and his chest well spread out, that Mr. Carstone said : "I am a self-made man ;" it was then that Violet looked up with enthusiastic face and admiring eyes ; it was then for the first time, that the adoring young husband felt really angry with her, and realized that his wife's feelings were more in unison with those of the Carstones than with his own.

" I am not going to say anything against the aristocracy and nobility of this land," continued the retired corn-factor. " In my humble opinion many of them are merely old women, and most of them no better than they should be. But, if you want to know the class of men that make the sinews and muscles of old England, I say, sir, it is the self-made men, and I am proud to call myself one."

" Those are my very thoughts, Mr. Carstone," cried Violet, delightedly ; " you have just put them into words." And she did not observe how dark was the frown that spread over the high-bred face of her husband.

" You will allow every man to form his own opinion on that as well as on every other point," said Lord Ryvers, courteously.

" Oh, certainly, every man may think as he likes ! " replied Richard Carstone.

" Then you must allow me most emphatically to contradict you. I believe, if you want to find the sinews and muscles of old England, you will find them amongst the grand old races whose fathers fought and bled for the liberties which have made England what she is."

" Therein we differ," said the corn-factor, slowly.

" Why, Richard," interrupted his comely wife, " no one loves a lord better than you do ! How delighted you were when Lord Brooks shook hands with you at Batwell ! "

Richard Carstone for one minute looked slightly red and uncomfortable. He could not deny the fact.

"My dear," he said, "while a lord is an English institution, we must respect him."

"For my part," declared his wife, "I am like Mr. Randolph here; I admire the aristocracy, and I should like to be one of them. As for your beautiful young wife here, Mr. Randolph, she is far more fitted to be a duchess than an artist's wife."

The very grandeur of his bow dismayed the good-natured lady.

"If I did not know he was an artist, I should say he was an earl at least," she said to herself. "I never saw such a high way with any one before."

"Give me a self-made man!" continued the complacent corn-factor. "A man who has made his money enjoys spending it. What is more, he enjoys touching it. I do. It is a pleasure to me to take up a handful of sovereigns."

"If you heard a nobleman boast in that fashion of his rank or his title, what would you think of him?" asked Lord Ryvers.

"Think of him!" replied Mr. Carstone, growing very red in the face. "I should think he had very little to boast of."

"And I," said Lord Ryvers, quietly, "think that the self-made man has still less."

So it rose—in the beautiful sunlit evening—the cloud no bigger than a man's hand. How dark it was to grow, how widely spread, none of the five standing there together on the terrace could foresee.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Carstones were of a type common enough in these days. "The self-made man," as Mr. Carstone so proudly called himself, had started with the usual six-pence in his pocket, and had risen by degrees from the rank of errand-boy to the positions of porter, clerk, confidential manager, and finally partner, in one of the largest businesses in England. He had worked hard, honestly, and well; he was marvelously shrewd and wonderfully sure in all his transactions; he was scrupulously honest—and in business honesty is perhaps the best capital. After many years of hard industry, he retired, thinking that he should enjoy the remainder of his life in quite a new capacity.

He was exceedingly rich. Looking at his gains, he marveled at them. He had but one child, Oscar, and to him the corn-factor had given the best education possible. If he erred at all in that direction, it was that he had rather over-educated him. In his heart Richard Carstone longed for daughters. He was one of those men never so happy as when surrounded by pretty and amiable women ; but, when he realized what his life's work had done for him, he was well pleased that he had a son and heir. He had recently purchased a fine estate, called Ingleshaw, although it was not precisely the abode one would have thought suitable for a self-made man. It was a magnificent old mansion, standing in the midst of extensive grounds. It had none of the newness that is at times so dear to the soul of the newly rich. The choice of Ingleshaw was due to the influence of Oscar.

"There is nothing like antiquity, father," he said ; "by the time my children succeed, it will seem as though our family had lived here for hundreds of years. The corn will be forgotten."

And it was strangely inconsistent with the theories of the self-made man that this influenced him.

Ingleshaw was purchased. Oscar declared that there was a strange fitness in the name—"the Carstones of Ingleshaw"—and, after a few weeks, Ingleshaw became the very pride of the old man's life. He was fortunate enough to meet with a house decorator and finisher who spoke his mind.

"Do not spoil that place, sir, with new furniture and gilding," he said : "it will be quite out of keeping. Everything must match the house. You want old tapestry, old carvings, old pictures, old china, old furniture, antiques of all kinds ; you want Oriental bronzes, grand enamels, old buhl-work ; you want ancient plate, quaint old German glass and ancient armor."

"All of which," replied Richard Carstone, solemnly, "I will have. But where and how shall I get them ?"

"I will get some on commission ; the rest you can purchase."

And it was when making inquiries as to them when Richard Carstone heard about the old-fashioned town of St. Philipo, that treasury of hidden art.

"You can buy anything there," said his informant—

"vases and jasper and malachite, china that once belonged to the famous Du Barry, pictures by the old masters." In fact, there was no end to the art-treasures of St. Philipo.

Richard Carstone never dreamed that it was written in the scroll of fate that here his life and the fortunes of a noble English family should meet and cross.

He went to St. Philipo, taking with him his comely, good-humored wife, and his son Oscar, of whose opinion he stood in no little awe. A few thousands, more or less, were nothing to him, and he meant to make Ingleshaw famous.

"They shall see what a self-made man can do with his money, Oscar," he said. "I will put some of their old houses to shame."

He was looked upon as a perfect godsend by the shopkeepers of St. Philipo. Of course they called him "milord;" and it was strange, for a self-made man, how the title delighted him—indeed, when addressed as "milord," he never disputed the price of an article, nor found it too high, a fact which was soon discovered.

He had made a magnificent collection, and had spent a small fortune. He had not cared much for St. Philipo; it was not the style of place for him at all; and when Lord Ryvers came to the hotel he was delighted. There would be some one to join himself and Oscar at the solitary billiard-table. But the "artist" did not seem to appreciate the honor and condescension.

"Holds himself pretty high," he said to his son; "but then, no doubt, he is a genius. Many of those painters are, I suppose."

And his son told him the story of the French King who had picked up the brush a great painter had let fall, and the retired corn-factor looked somewhat doubtful. A king is a king. Still, in spite of many rebuffs, he persisted in courting the society of the supposed young artist.

"He might be such a help to us, Oscar," he said, "if he would but speak out. I like him in spite of his high and mighty fashion."

But Lord Ryvers never would speak; when his opinion was asked on works of art or pictures, he either avoided the subject or gave a careless answer. The corn-factor would glance ruefully from him to his son.

"If he would but speak out!" he sighed.

There was no particular good feeling between the young

men. Lord Ryvers did not like Oscar, and the dislike was returned with interest. The party would not have held together long but for the two ladies ; and they were excellent friends. Violet really liked Mrs. Carstone, and was amused and interested when with her ; and Mrs. Carstone had a real affection for the young girl, whom her son called "a beauty wasted."

The Carstone family caused many disagreements between husband and wife. One afternoon, when they were all together, Oscar said to Violet :

" How much you like orange-blossoms ! I see you always wear them."

" They are my favorite flowers," she said, " orange-blossoms and Lenten lilies."

The next day Oscar, when he returned from some neighboring city, brought with him a magnificent bouquet of orange-blossoms, the largest, finest, and most fragrant it was possible to find. Violet was charmed with it. She hastened with it to her husband.

" Oh, Randolph, see ! Look up, dear ! See what beautiful flowers that good Mr. Oscar Carstone has brought for me ! "

Perhaps for a very loving, slightly jealous young husband it was not the most pleasant thing in the world to see his wife's young face brightening over the gift of another man. Lord Ryvers, usually one of the sweetest-tempered men in the world, frowned angrily.

" Did that snob bring you those flowers, Violet ? How dared he take such a liberty ? "

" What did you call him, Randolph ? " asked his wife.

" Never mind what I called him ; I say it is a liberty, and you ought not to have taken them."

He always thought of his wife as Lady Ryvers of Ryvers well, and expected people to treat her with the consideration due to her rank. He was apt to forget that that rank was hidden from the eyes of every one else.

" The world must change for me," said Violet, " before I consider it a liberty for a gentleman to bring me flowers, or before I should be so foolish as to refuse them."

" I would not care if the man were a gentleman," cried Lord Ryvers.

" My dear Randolph," said his wife, " you forget that he holds a higher position than we do."

If she had struck him in the face, he could not have recoiled more. Again the hot, impatient blood of his race rose to his brow; again he controlled the angry words that rose from his heart to his lips.

"You are not a competent judge," he said, slowly.

"I am."

Violet swept him a courtesy that would have done honor to a grand duchess. Lord Ryvers went on, angrily:

"The man presumes to admire you, Violet; and you know it."

"You did the same thing, and you consider yourself a good judge," laughed Violet.

"That is quite a different matter," replied Lord Ryvers, hotly. "The admiration of a man of that class is an insult."

"I do not think so," said Violet, calmly; "and I do not understand your constant allusion to 'class.'"

Lord Ryvers turned away abruptly; in another moment he would have betrayed his carefully guarded secret. He could not endure even half-angry words from the lips he loved. He silently resolved that he would never argue with her again; but he would speak to that "young snob" himself. Violet was so young, so simple, and had seen so little of the world, that, even if he made love to her, she would not know it.

"This is the worst of my Quixotic idea," he said, to himself. "It brings me into contact with this kind of people, and every instinct of my nature rises against them."

He would not own to himself that he was jealous—the very idea was preposterous. Jealous of the son of a retired corn-factor! Surely the ancient race of Ryvers would blush for him. Certainly he was not jealous; yet there was a very uncomfortable feeling in his heart, a very warm flush on his face, an angry light in his eye.

"I shall certainly put a stop to it," said Lord Ryvers to himself. "If he had brought her any other flowers except orange-blossoms, it would not have seemed so marked. It is intolerable!"

He was not jealous; but he followed Oscar Carstone with angry eyes. He waited his opportunity for speaking, and, when they were in the billiard-room of the hotel, he said abruptly:

"One word with you, Mr. Oscar Carstone."

"Twenty, if you like, Mr. Artist," was the reply.

"I have a name, sir," said Lord Ryvers.

"And a profession; probably the profession is the nobler of the two," retorted Oscar, who was beginning to dislike the artist most cordially.

"I want one word with you," repeated Lord Ryvers, coolly. "I object and that very strongly, to your presenting flowers to Mrs. Randolph."

"Why, may I ask?"

"That is my affair: I object to it. Mrs. Randolph"—he could not bring himself to say "my wife,"—"is very young, and is as simple as a child. I know the world myself, and object to floral flirtations."

"I heard Mrs. Randolph say that she liked orange-blossoms, and, seeing some very fine ones, I brought them to her. I see nothing but a common act of courtesy in that," declared Oscar.

"We do not all see these matters in the same light," said Lord Ryvers; "and my wish is to be respected."

"If you choose to deprive your wife of such a simple little pleasure, it does not affect me," sneered Oscar. "I am only sorry that you find it needful."

Hot words and blows would have followed, but that some strangers came into the room. From that hour it was not dislike, but hatred, that existed between the two.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I SHOULD take no notice of it, Oscar," said Mrs. Carstone. "I have always thought he was jealous. Not that you have given him any cause. Most probably the young man has never been in such society as ours, and does not understand the little acts of courtesy so natural between ladies and gentlemen. I myself have always thought the custom of presenting flowers very harmless."

"He gives himself the airs of a grand duke!" cried the indignant Oscar. "The idea of saying he would not tolerate a floral flirtation! If I had my own way—— But for her sake I must be silent and say nothing."

"That will be best," replied his mother. "Young men always quarrel where a pretty woman is concerned."

"Mother," said Oscar, feelingly, "do not call Mrs. Randolph a pretty woman. It jars upon me."

"What is she, my dear?"

"She is perfectly, superbly beautiful," he cried, with enthusiasm, "and far too good for that—"

"Nay, Oscar—say no more about him," interrupted Mrs. Carstone.

"I will not, mother; but, as sure as the sun shines above us, I will repay him for his insolence!"

And in the time to come he kept his word.

Meanwhile letters from England became more urgent. The Dowager Lady Ryvers, quite unconscious that she was a dowager, wrote to her son continually. She was growing anxious concerning his absence. It was quite unnatural that he should stay from home with such a brilliant career before him. She could not understand it; and she had confided to her married daughter, the Countess of Lester, that she feared there was some entanglement. But the Countess reassured her. Randolph was the last person in the world to associate with anything of that kind; she said his devotion to art was his grand preservation.

"There is a silver lining to every cloud, mamma," said the Countess. "It seems most deplorable that Randolph should devote a life that ought to have been given to other duties to painting. But after all, art purifies and exalts those who love it. You need fear no entanglement for him."

"Heaven grant that you are right my dear," said the anxious mother. "Any disappointment with regard to Randolph would be my death; all my hopes are centered in him."

"You will have none, mamma," the Countess of Lester assured her.

Still Lady Ryvers looked anxious.

"Randolph has always had peculiar ideas," she said.

"True, mamma; but they were always the ideas of a gentleman. You know that to the very core of his heart Randolph is a gentleman."

"I know it," said Lady Ryvers, gently. "Still I shall be very pleased when he returns."

She wrote again and again; but the letter that really reused the young man from his dream was the one in which

she suggested that, if he had really found such charming quarters that he could not leave them, the best thing would be for her to visit him. Then he knew that he must take active measures soon.

Lord Ryvers was not quite happy ; there were shadows in the eyes that had once been all light and love, lines on the beautiful face which should not have appeared for many years yet. Life was not quite the dream of happiness that he had hoped it would be. He had given up all the world for love, but love had not paid him. He found himself in a terrible dilemma. He dreaded telling his secret to Violet, whose ideas and opinions seemed to grow stronger every day, and he dreaded giving his mother pain.

Still he was too loyal even to ask himself whether he had done an unwise thing. If it were to be done over again, with double the risk, double the difficulty, he would do it—for Violet was all the world to him. There was some doubt in his mind as to how he should get through his difficulties ; but he was not troubled with regret.

He was thinking deeply, when Violet came into his studio.

" Randolph," she said, " you are busy this morning ? "

" Never too busy to attend to you, my darling," he replied. " What do you want ? "

" If you are engaged, and do not really wish me to sit with you, I should like to go out with Mrs. Carstone."

" Where is she going ? " was the natural question.

" To visit some friends who have just taken one of those beautiful villas on the hill," she replied.

" English people ? " he asked.

" Yes ; but I forget the name. I should like to go ; Mrs. Carston says they are such nice people."

The handsome face grew dark.

" It seems to me, Violet," he said, gently, " that you pay but little heed to my wishes. I have told you so often that I do not wish for any English acquaintances."

" I think my feelings and inclinations are to be considered as well as yours," she replied. " I like English people, and no other."

He looked perplexed ; then he crossed the room to where she was standing.

" Let my wishes prevail in this instance, Violet," he said, gently. " Believe me, I have good reasons. I do not like the Carstones, and do not care to know their

trials. Be your own sweet self, and please me by not accompanying Mrs. Carstone this morning."

But she had still lingering in her ears Oscar's half-laughing, half-taunting words when his mother gave her the invitation.

"It is of no use, mother," he had cried, laughingly. "Our friend the artist is quite a Bluebeard; he will not let her go."

"Nonsense!" Violet had rejoined, with some little vexation. "Just as though I could not go where I liked!"

And now his words were verified.

"Randolph," she cried, angrily, "do you know that you treat me very much like a child?"

"You are a child, woman, and queen, all in one," he said.

"Yet in none of those capacities can I pay a little visit when I wish," she replied.

"Ah, my darling," he cried, "do not add to my perplexities! Violet, I am in trouble." The handsome face drooped over hers, and he laid his arms caressingly round her shoulders. "I am in trouble, Violet."

Her fair face paled a little.

"Ah!" she said. "You have been spending too much money. I have been afraid of it."

He did not undeceive her. Better that she should think it a money-trouble than know the reality just yet—above all, until he had decided what course to pursue. She must not run the risk of meeting English people.

"Of course," she said, gravely, "that alters everything. Oh, Randolph, darling, I am so grieved! And I know—I am sure that you have run all this risk for my sake. It is for me you have gone to all this expense. But, my dear, my dear, you need not, you must not. Believe me, I should be as happy with you in two little rooms as in this grand hotel—nay, happier; for, my darling Randolph, this does not suit you, you have not been half so happy lately. I have never heard you sing 'June's palace paved with gold' since we have been here. You have done all to please me, I know. How thoughtless and cruel I have been not to have foreseen this!"

Then he folded her more tightly in his arms, and kissed

with passionate, vehement love, the beautiful face. It was worth it all—all the pain, the difficulty, the doubt—to be loved so entirely for himself. Thank Heaven, he was loved for himself—not for his money, not for his rank, not for his title!

She wondered a little at the passionate kisses that he rained on her face.

"Why, Randolph," she said, "you are more of a lover than ever!"

"And you, my darling, more worthy of being loved," he replied.

"I will go back to Mrs. Carstone, and tell her that I cannot go with her," she said; and her face was more radiant than if she had just heard that a large fortune had been left to her. "Then, Randolph, we will talk about ways and means. Let me work, dear, do—I should be so happy! This life does not suit me or please me; I want more to do. I will not be long. Now, give me one smile before I go; and—and—if I have been tiresome, do forgive me, Randolph darling."

When he was alone, he wondered if she had given him the greatest love of which she was capable. How radiant her face was when he kissed her! Was it possible that in that pure, noble soul there were depths he had not reached? He thought of her words in Paris—"Love can be made perfect only through suffering." There had been no shadow over her love; no suffering had come near her. He had no thought of the future, of the intolerable anguish that was to be his. He began to wonder, if Violet had met Oscar Carstone first, whether she would have loved him. He wished that she had more opportunities, that she had seen other men, that she had seen more of the world. She seemed to have many ideas in common with Oscar Carstone, far more than she had with him. Then he laughed aloud at himself.

"I am jealous," he said—"jealous of the simple, beautiful Violet who has bloomed for my eyes alone."

He smiled to think that she should imagine he was troubled over money matters. How simple and innocent she was! Ah! Heaven, thank Heaven, he had won that pearl above all price—a woman who loved him for himself, and himself alone!

CHAPTER XIX

FOR some days after that little interview matters went on more smoothly. Violet's affection for her husband was quickened and roused by the thought that he was in trouble, and that the trouble was caused by his having spent too much money on her. Her generous, noble nature warmed to him; she cared more for him during the next few days than she had ever done, and he was in the seventh heaven of delight. One thing that puzzled him just a little, although he did not give much thought to it, was the strange attitude of the Carstone family toward him; there was a kind of subdued pity in their manner, and once more Richard Carstone began to urge him to accept commissions for pictures. He never dreamed that Violet, in her absolute simplicity and ignorance of the world, had frankly told them that her husband was troubled about money. To her there was nothing to be ashamed of in the fact. No one that she had known ever had enough money; it seemed to her the chronic state of half the world. She had no idea, not even the faintest, that all the virtue and talent in the world would not cover the most fatal of all wants—want of money.

"We must be careful," said Richard Carstone, whose pockets were lined with gold. "After all, I am almost glad that the man has kept aloof from us. If we had been very intimate, he would have begun to borrow money; it is the first thing these improvident men do. I should not be surprised, Mary, my dear, if he is staying here because he cannot pay his hotel bill."

"I hope it is nothing quite so bad as that," said the kindly wife. "If it is, I must do something to help the girl, for I am really fond of her."

But a delicate little investigation, carried on by Oscar, proved just the contrary. There seemed to be no lack of ready money. The landlord told him, in strict confidence, that the English artist was the best payer in the hotel, that his donations to the servants and waiters and his gifts to the poor showed that he had plenty of money at command.

"It may be, mother," said Oscar, "that he has had plenty until now, and that he foresees a shortness I

have thought lately that he had something on his mind; he looks so thoughtful, or rather so uneasy. I am quite sure there is something wrong. Perhaps his pictures will not sell."

"In that case you would imagine that he would be only too pleased to accept your father's offer."

"I do not think so. He does not like any of us, and he is jealous of me."

Lord Ryvers was thoughtful. More than once Oscar Carstone had found him walking on the terrace, his handsome brows knitted, his lips tightly drawn, a frown on the open brow, and the shadow of deep thought in his eyes.

"Money," said the heir of Ingleshaw to himself—"money! Nothing but want of money ever makes a man look like that." And, although he was by no means ill-natured, he was not altogether sorry that the man who would persist in treating him as an inferior was in some trouble. "I would lend him a few hundreds myself," he said, "without saying anything to my father, if he would humble himself even ever so little, but never while he carries himself like that."

Violet saw her husband pacing up and down the terrace; and the sight of his troubled face went to her heart. She remembered how sanguine he had been, how he had lavished everything upon her, always telling her that he could afford it. She went up to him, and placed her arm in his.

"Let us share the walk and the thoughts and the trouble. You look worried, Randolph. Is it about money?"

"Certainly money has to do with it," he replied, vaguely.

"Cheer up, Randolph! While we have youth, health, and strength, it seems to me a sad thing to be troubled about money. I would not be so troubled," she added, with a bright laugh. "Why, Randolph, you need not be down-hearted! You know you carry your fortune in those clever fingers of yours." And, with a quick, graceful motion, she bent down and kissed his hands.

"You are the sweetest comforter in the world, Violet," he said. His honest heart beat with delight, his honest face cleared and brightened.

"When I talk to you about money, Randolph," she remarked, "you always begin to praise me."

"Because I think you the least mercenary person in the world," he replied; "and, just as I detest mercenary, so I love unmercenary, people."

"I hope I shall always have enough to eat and to drink; and a roof over my head, with just a few simple pleasures; beyond that I care but little," Violet declared.

He bent down and kissed the beautiful face; such a grand, noble, generous soul shone out of those violet eyes.

"It is for that I love you so, my darling!" he cried.

"Randolph," she said, after a short pause, "I wish you would be a little more worldly wise."

"Do you? But I thought you did not care about worldly people."

"I do not; but there is a proper kind of worldliness. Now listen patiently; promise me beforehand that you will not be cross."

"I will not," he replied.

Still she hesitated, with a curious kind of hesitation.

"I am half afraid," she said, with a little tremulous laugh; and that admission made him very tender toward her. "I do want you to be more worldly wise," she went on. "I can see how you might make a great deal of money."

"Tell me how," he said.

"By being a little more amiable to the Carstones. They are rich people—oh, Randolph, they are so rich, and they give such great sums of money for pictures; and they like us!"

"Well," he said, for she had paused abruptly, "what then, Violet?"

"They like us," she repeated; "and I am quite sure, Randolph, if you would be just a little more agreeable to Mr. Carstone, he would buy as many pictures as you could paint. That would not be losing your independence; he would have far more than the value of his money." She wondered at the amused smile that played round his lips.

"You are not angry, Randolph?" she said.

"Not in the least," he replied.

"And you promise to think about it?"

"I promise," said Lord Ryvers.

"Will you go further still, and promise to make an effort to be more sociable with the Carstones?" she said.

"I will promise even that," he replied.

"Now I will test you," she said. "Mrs. Carstone has been to see me this morning, and we have both of us—both, mind, Randolph—a great favor to ask from you."

"To be really gallant, I ought to say that it is granted; but it will be wiser to know what it is before doing so."

"Every year, on the feast of St. Philipo, there is a ball given by—well, I do not know what they are called here but in England we call them the mayor and the corporation. The ball is given for the visitors. They go to immense trouble and expense over it, and the visitors make a point of going. Mrs. Carstone wants to take me."

"And you?" he said, gently.

"Oh, Randolph, I long to go! I have never been to a ball; I should enjoy it so much."

He knew that to give his consent to her going to this ball was the most imprudent thing he could do; but he did not know how to refuse her; she had just been so kind and loving to him.

"My dearest Violet," he said, "I would rather that you gave up the idea of going, unless you wish it greatly—I would much prefer your not going."

"Oh, Randolph, do you refuse me, dear? I have never even seen a ball; and they say this will be magnificent—such flowers, such lights! And I long to dance, just as a caged bird longs to fly."

"Would it be such a great pleasure to you, my darling?" he asked.

The beautiful face raised to his was very wistful.

"It would be the greatest possible pleasure," she answered.

"But, Violet, darling, you cannot dance."

"I can learn," she cried, eagerly. "It comes quite naturally to me to move to the measure of music."

"That I believe," he said.

"Mr. Oscar Carstone says he will teach me the steps, and to waltz."

"Mr. Oscar Carstone will do nothing of the kind!" her husband cried, his face flushing. "I will teach you myself."

"Can you dance, Randolph?" she asked, looking up at him in laughing wonder.

He was about to answer that he had been considered one of the best waltzers in London, when he stopped abruptly.

"I should not have thought you had had sufficient leis-

are in your life to think of dancing. It seems so strange. When will you teach me, Randolph?"

"If you go, I will take you, and, if you wish to dance, I will teach you," he replied.

She kissed him in a transport of delight; and he was touched at finding how she longed for a little pleasure.

"You shall go, Violet," he said, decisively. "I cannot refuse you. But you have no idea of the trouble of preparing for a ball."

"Trouble!" she repeated. "Why, Randolph, I should call it unbounded pleasure."

"You must have a ball-dress," he said, looking at the beautiful figure, with its graceful lines and curves.

Violet looked up at him shyly.

"I know you will not be willing, Randolph," she began, with some hesitation; "but Mrs. Carstone is going, and she will wear white moiré. She—that is—I—you will not, I know—but she seemed so very anxious too—that I should have one like it."

"You mean," he said, "that she has dared offer to give you a ball-dress?"

"Yes; but she did it so kindly; and, do you know, Randolph, she seemed half frightened, as though she hardly liked doing it."

"I am sure she meant kindly," he replied. "I hope you have all the dresses and everything else you need, Violet. Surely Mrs. Carstone has not imagined that you require a dress?"

"I have too many dresses, rather than too few," she said.

"I will buy you a ball-dress, and you will like it all the better because it is my choosing."

"You will not spend much money over it, Randolph? Remember, it will be a grief to me—not a pleasure—if you do that."

"I will not give one farthing more than I can afford," he said. "I feel that I have committed an imprudence in agreeing to let you go; but how could I refuse you?"

"I love such imprudence," she declared. "Aunt Alice said our marriage was a cruel imprudence: but it has not been less happy. The ball will be an imprudence, yet I dare say we shall both enjoy it."

But, if she could have foreseen all that would spring

from the ball at the Hôtel de Ville, she would not have gone to it.

"I knew," said Oscar to Mrs. Carstone, "that he would not let me give her a dancing-lesson. How delighted she was when I suggested it; and how I should have enjoyed it! I will take care of one thing—no matter what he says or does, I shall dance with her!"

Mrs. Carstone felt slightly uncomfortable.

"You must remember, Oscar," she said, "that a good wife is always obedient to her husband."

"That is all right," he returned, impatiently. "I do not want to interfere between husband and wife; but he might be a little more amiable. Why not let her practice dancing with me? It could not hurt him."

"No; but perhaps it is as well to be careful, Oscar. You are not the worst-looking man in the world, and she is but a young girl."

He was just a little flattered; but his dislike for Lord Ryvers increased from that hour. More than once he said to himself:

"Only let me have the chance, and I will pay him for every slight and every insult he has given me."

The chance and the time for such payment were both nearer than he thought, for strange events were about to happen, and the cloud that had been no bigger than a man's hand had grown and hung dark overhead.

CHAPTER XX.

VIOLET RANDOLPH was standing in her pretty sleeping-room, where the green vine-leaves shaded the window, a picture of pleased wonder and surprise. A handsome ball-dress lay spread out before her. She said to herself that it was a realized dream of what a ball-dress should be—a rich white silk, draped with the most exquisite lace, and trimmed with lilies of the valley; and with it lay everything needful for a ball-room toilet, even down to the white silk shoes, that might have been intended for Cinderella. There was a superb fan, with lilies of the valley most exquisitely worked on the white satin, a soft, warm *sortie du bal* of rich satin, embroidered with lilies, a magnificent bouquet of white lilies shrouded in their dark-green leaves, and a spray of pearls, shaped like lilies, for the hair.

Violet, as she looked at her treasures, thought more of their beauty than their cost. It was not in girl-nature to keep the sight of these beautiful things to herself. She went to Mrs. Carstone, and found that lady in a state of subdued ecstasy, because her milliner had made a train of rich ruby velvet for her dress of white brocade.

"Will you come and look at my ball-dress?" Violet said, after she had duly admired her friend's. "I should like to know if it is suitable. I have had no experience."

As the stately lady sailed along the corridors, she resolved to be very kind and condescending. She must praise the dress, no matter what it looked like—that was imperative. No doubt it was some cheap pretty costume that Mrs. Randolph had bought. But all her condescension vanished in a mist of wonder when she saw Violet's magnificent toilet.

"It is exquisite!" she cried, with upraised hands—"perfectly exquisite! You must let Barton, my maid, dress you. Then she examined the lace. "Why, this is real!" she cried. "This is real lace, Mrs. Randolph!"

"Is it?" asked Violet, serenely, without the least idea of the value of real lace.

Then Mrs. Carstone looked fixedly at the beautiful, queenly girl before her.

"My dear," she inquired, in a strange tone of voice, "what is your husband?"

"My husband!" echoed Violet, in a tone of wonder at the question. "He is an artist, you know, Mrs. Carstone."

"He must be a very successful artist to give you a toilet of this description."

"He is successful," said Violet, proudly. "How can he be otherwise with his talent?"

"He must make a great deal of money to purchase such things as these; and I—pray do not think me rude, my dear—I understood you to say that he had some little trouble about money. Do you know the cost of this really magnificent present?"

"No," laughed Violet; "I have never bought such things."

"Including the lace, which is real, and the pearls, which are very fine ones, your husband could not have paid less than two hundred pounds for it," said Mrs. Carstone. "I

have a lace flounce, not so fine as this, which cost me over eighty guineas."

"Two hundred pounds!" cried Violet, aghast. "It surely cannot be!"

"I should think it was more, if anything," replied Mrs. Carstone.

"Do excuse me for one minute," Violet exclaimed, hastily. "I will not have it. Randolph must send it back again."

Then she flew, rather than walked, to her husband's studio.

"Randolph," she cried, "Mrs. Carstone says the things you have purchased for me have cost two hundred pounds! Is it true?"

"No," he replied; "they were within that sum."

"I am so glad," she said, her face brightening. "They are so beautiful, and I should like to keep them; but I would not if they cost that sum."

"Violet, never mind Mrs. Carstone; trust me. We artists have opportunities of purchase known only to ourselves. Wear your pretty dress, my dear, and rest assured that I have not in the least exceeded my means."

She was comforted, and hastened back to Mrs. Carstone.

"It is all right," she said to that astonished lady; "Mr. Randolph says I need not be in the least uneasy about it."

"Of course, my dear, he knows his business best," said Mrs. Carstone. "The dress is fit for a duchess, and you will look magnificent in it; but you must never talk about your husband having a money trouble again—never."

"I will not," replied Violet, simply.

No more was said; but Mrs. Carstone did not feel quite satisfied. There was some mystery, she felt sure; and she could not rest until she told her husband.

"I cannot say that I am surprised, Mary," he remarked, after listening attentively to his wife's disclosures. "I have always thought there was something mysterious about Mr. Randolph. She is open and frank enough; but I have never understood him."

"What can be wrong with them?" asked Mrs. Carstone.

"I should not like to offer an opinion, my dear," replied her husband—"in fact, I could not guess; but I am quite sure there is something amiss, even if we never find it out."

I should not trouble about it, Mary ; they are respectable, and he is an artist—a clever one, no doubt. I quite agree with Oscar—if you can get Mrs. Randolph to visit you in London, your position will be made."

"I felt, when I saw her, that she was to bring good luck to me," said Mrs. Carstone ; "but I should like to know what this mystery is."

"You may depend upon one thing," remarked Mr. Carstone—"Mrs. Randolph will be the belle of the ball ; and, when she has been seen, we shall have all the grandes in the neighborhood inviting her. If you play your cards well we shall be invited too, Mary."

"It seems a strange thing that a beautiful face can gain admittance where money cannot," said Mrs. Carstone.

"The world is full of strange things, my dear," rejoined the retired corn-factor. "I think myself that a beautiful woman is far more to be admired even than a moneyed man."

And then Mrs. Carstone forgot her doubts, fears, suspicions, and everything else, in her great anxiety about the ball.

No one dreamed that that night would bring about a crisis in many lives.

The Hôtel de Villè was brilliantly illuminated. It was a grand building, with fine old carvings and arched windows—a noble specimen of architecture ; there was an excellent band, the flowers were magnificent—indeed, the scene altogether was one of great brilliancy and animation.

The guests were numerous and select. By far the most beautiful woman present was Violet Randolph. As she stood under the great chandelier, the light falling full on her golden hair, with its spray of pearls, on the beautiful face, with its dainty flush, on the exquisite figure, with its graceful floating draperies, she made as fair a picture as could well be imagined.

Of course she was the queen and the belle ; admiring eyes followed her ; a little crowd of worshipers gathered round her. She was overwhelmed with entreaties for a dance ; but as she knew nothing except the waltz, she was compelled to refuse many invitations.

"Violet," whispered her husband, "etiquette or not, I shall have the first dance with you. It is your first ball, your first waltz, and it must be with me."

She complied laughingly.

Oscar, on seeing this, and hearing such warm praise of the beautiful pair, was disgusted. He relieved himself in some measure by opening his mind to his mother.

"This shows," he said, "that I have been right in my estimation of the man; he is no gentleman. Would a gentleman monopolize his own wife?"

"Certainly not," replied Mrs. Carstone. "But, Oscar, I hear that there are some distinguished English people here. Is it true?"

"I heard something of the same kind; but I was too vexed to listen," he replied.

"Never mind Mrs. Randolph now," said his mother; "discover who these people are. Mind, Oscar—if they are worth knowing, be sure and get some introductions."

He returned after a few minutes, looking somewhat excited and interested.

"A good old English family," he said in a low voice—"the Forest-Hays. Lady Forest-Hay will be pleased to know you; they are staying at the 'Lion d'Or.' I wish we had gone there, instead of to the English hotel."

"What and who are the Forest-Hays? I have never heard of them," said Mrs. Carstone.

"Every one knows them," replied Oscar, in a tone of surprise. "Lord Forest-Hay is one of the Tory leaders. It seems that St. Philipo is their favorite place of resort in the autumn. I like the son—Hubert; I have been talking to him."

"Can we introduce the Randolphs?" asked Mrs. Carstone, anxiously.

"I should not just at first," was the cautious reply. "Mrs. Randolph, of course, one would be proud to present; but her husband is so queer, he would do us no credit."

Presently an introduction took place between Lady Forest-Hay and Mrs. Carstone.

Hubert, the son and heir, who had already made a name for himself in Parliament, seemed interested, and talked for some time about the ball.

"My mother likes St. Philipo," he said; "she spends a month or two here every year. My father does not care about it; he and I generally go further south. There are some pretty girls here; but who is that golden-haired girl in white silk?"

"That is Mrs. Randolph," replied Oscar, "an English lady staying at the English hotel."

"I do not think I have ever seen a more beautiful woman," declared the young man.

And then Oscar Carstone felt anxious to have the honor of introducing this perfectly beautiful woman to his new acquaintance.

"The Randolphs are great friends of ours," he said, eagerly; "we are staying at the same hotel. I shall be very pleased to introduce you, if you like."

"And I shall be delighted to have the opportunity of making the acquaintance of such a peerless woman," said his companion. "I am fortunate; I shall find quite a pleasant circle here. If my expectations are realized, I shall remain for some time in St. Philipo. I saw an old college chum of mine as we passed through the rooms; he did not see me, and I had not time to stop and speak to him."

"An Englishman?" asked Oscar, anxiously.

"Yes—and a very famous Englishman, too—Lord Ryvers of Ryverswell."

"Is he here, do you say?" asked Oscar.

"I saw him in one of the reception-rooms," replied Hubert Forest-Hay.

"It is strange that I have not heard the name," said Oscar. "I thought I knew all the English people in St. Philipo. Where is he staying?"

"I do not know. He was with me at Oxford. I know him well, and like him much."

"I should like to see him," said Oscar.

His companion glanced round the room.

"He is not here; but I am sure to see him again. I will introduce you, if you wish. Ryverswell is, to my thinking, one of the finest places in England. That Mrs. Randolph is a beautiful woman. What is the husband like?"

"He is not to be compared with her, not for a moment; he is an artist and a snob."

"Yet the husband of such a grand creature as that!"

"Yes. I cannot tolerate him; but I admire his wife. None of us like him."

"Is he here?" asked Hubert Forest-Hay.

"Yes; he brought her. He would not let her come with us. My mother, who is good nature itself, wanted to Chapman her. He positively danced the first waltz with her."

The young politician laughed.

"Ah," he said, suddenly, and his face brightened, "there is my old friend Lord Ryvers."

"Where?" asked Oscar.

"That tall, handsome man leaning against the white statue."

Oscar Carstone looked at him with a strange expression almost of terror, on his face.

"Do you mean the man with the flower in his coat?"

"Yes," replied his companion—"that is Lord Ryvers."

"That Lord Ryvers? Why, he calls himself 'Mr. Randolph'! He is the husband of the golden-haired girl, and he lives at the English hotel with us!"

And for some moments the two stood looking at each other in silent wonder.

CHAPTER XXI.

"You must surely be mistaken!" cried Hubert Forest-Hay. "You must be dreaming. I assure you that that gentleman is Randolph, Lord Ryvers of Ryverswell, of Mount Avon in Hampshire, of Avon Villa in the Isle of Wight, of Glenfair in Scotland, and Avon House, Mayfair. You see, I know his titles and possessions by heart. His father has been dead many years, and he has succeeded to a vast fortune, the savings of a long minority. His mother, Lady Ryvers, is—well, I should certainly say, one of the proudest women in England. He has two sisters; one lives with Lady Ryvers, the other is a great leader of fashion—the Countess of Lester. You see, that I cannot be mistaken in his identity."

Still Oscar Carstone looked at him with vague, wondering eyes.

"And I know him as 'Mr. Randolph,' a clever but by no means well-known artist. He has been staying with Mrs. Randolph at the English hotel for some weeks. There must be some mistake. His wife told my mother some few days since that he was in some trouble concerning money."

Here Hubert Forest-Hay laughed aloud.

"Money troubles! Why, Lord Ryvers is one of the richest men in England. If he has any trouble with regard to money, it is that he has so much, he does not know what to do with it."

"Are you quite sure that is Lord Ryvers?" asked Oscar.
"I am as sure of his identity as I am of my own," replied Hubert Forest-Hay.

"Who is the lady?" Oscar Carstone asked suddenly, "If you know Lord Ryvers so well, you must know his wife."

But Hubert Forest-Hay shook his head gravely.

"I assure you I have never seen her before; and, now that I reflect, I never heard that Lord Ryvers was married. I remember hearing that he was struck with the last new beauty, Gwendoline Marr, Lord Marr's daughter."

"Was this lady Miss Marr?" asked Oscar.

"No. Gwendoline Marr is one of the most beautiful women in London, but a brunette—a perfect brunette. I met Lady Ryvers last week—I was with her for half an hour—and she said nothing about her son being married—not one word; and I think, knowing that he was an old chum of mine, she would have told me."

Again the two men looked blankly at each other.

"I am sorry I came," said Hubert Forest-Hay, slowly; "I am sorry I have seen him. There is no mistake about it. The man I know to be Lord Ryvers you know as Mr Randolph."

"There is no particular harm in any gentleman laying aside his title if he chooses," said Oscar.

"No, there is no harm in that," was the answer—"none whatever."

Both young men were silent; their eyes were fixed on the beautiful face shining under the light of the great chandelier.

"Is it a private marriage, should you think?" Oscar said, in a low voice.

"Only Heaven knows," replied his companion; "I cannot say. It is no business of mine. I wish I had not come."

Oscar Carstone bent down and whispered a few words in his ear. Hubert Forest-Hay looked up with a horrified face.

"I am almost afraid you are right," he said. "Yet Randolph Ryvers was one of the most honorable and loyal of men. He can never have fallen so low."

Again Oscar Carstone whispered to his companion, who answered:

"I am afraid it is so; it looks like it. You say that he avoids all English people?"

"That he certainly does," was the answer. "But, if it be as we surmise, I am sure that girl has been foully, cruelly

deceived!" His face flushed and his eyes flashed fire. "Do you know," he added, fiercely, "it seems a strange thing to say, but, if it be true, and she is free, I would make her my wife to-morrow! You do not understand that?"

"I do not understand what I consider perfect madness," said Hubert Forest-Hay, coldly.

"If I thought it true—my suspicions true," cried Oscar—"I would shoot him just as I would shoot a dog!"

"My good friend, if you were to shoot every man who does a wrong of that kind, you would leave the world half empty."

"But look at her! She is lovely and proud, imperial and gracious. Would any one dare wrong a woman like that?"

"It is quite possible that there may have been no wrong," said Hubert Forest-Hay. "We have no right to judge by appearances, although I confess that in this case the appearances are black enough. Had you no suspicion that he was masquerading? It seems to me that any one could tell Lord Ryvers mixed in the highest circles."

Oscar looked slightly crestfallen. He did not wish his newly made friend to think that he was deficient, or could not recognize a gentleman by birth when he saw one.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I have been very much puzzled. I never thought he was what he represented himself to be; but I must also own that I never guessed him to be what he is. Why, he has worked as hard as a professional man! He has a studio in the hotel, which he has had fitted up at his own expense."

"He was always fond of painting. I remember now hearing that he had gone on a sketching-tour; but that was more than a year ago. Do you know anything of the girl's antecedents—what her name was, or where she came from?"

"Not one word," replied Oscar. "She is not reticent either; but it so happens that I have never heard her speak of herself at all. I can answer for one thing—that she is an angel. My mother loves her."

"He introduced her to your mother then?" said his companion. "It must be all right."

"The introduction came about accidentally. The thing that has annoyed me always is that he never seems to think my mother or any of the rest of us good enough acquaintances for her."

"That seems more hopeful, I think," said Hubert Forest-Hay. "Lord Ryvers is a man of the strictest honor."

"What shall we do?" demanded Oscar, breathlessly.

"Do nothing. The safest rule is to leave other people's affairs entirely alone."

"But it cannot go on!" cried the other.

"What right have we to interfere?" said Hubert-Forest Hay.

"The right of the strong to protect the weak," replied Oscar.

"But you do not know that the lady is weak. Remember, this is all supposition. Even if your worst suspicions were verified, what could you do? It is no business of yours; nor can you by any possibility make it so."

"It ought to be the business of every honest man to right a wrong when the opportunity occurs for doing so," declared Oscar.

"Very good in theory, but in practice difficult of accomplishment," rejoined his companion. "You must remember another thing—and let it make you cautious. Suppose you interfere in the matter, and then find out that you have made a foolish mistake, and that that golden-haired girl is Lady Ryvers. It would be awkward, to say the least of it. Take my advice, and say nothing at all."

"But that seems cowardly," remarked Oscar.

"I am incapable of counseling cowardice, as I am of advising useless, idle, and vain interference," said Hubert Forest-Hay, calmly. "You see, we have come across a certain fact that is incomprehensible. It may hide a wrong or a mystery. In either case, it has nothing to do with us. I tell you, candidly, my feeling in the matter is a very strong one. I have nothing to do with the private life of an old college friend. If I had had even the faintest idea of anything unusual, I should not have mentioned Lord Ryvers' name. I shall keep the whole affair a profound secret, and I should advise you to do the same."

But Oscar was almost too excited to understand.

"I shall not remain here now," said Hubert Forest-Hay. "A friend of mine has been urging me to go with him to Sicily, and I shall accept the invitation, starting to-morrow. I should not like any unpleasant complication to arise through me."

"That is carrying chivalry too far," said Oscar.

"I do not think so. I know his family ; I know Lad Ryvers and the Countess of Lester well ; and, because I know them, I am anxious to know no more of his affairs than I can help."

"Then, if the marriage is legal, the lady we have been calling Mrs. Randolph is Lady Ryvers?"

"Certainly she is ; and all that I have to say upon the matter is this, that when he takes Lady Ryvers to England, he will remember the day. Now you take my counsel and say nothing. I shall go back to the 'Lion d'Or'; I should not care to meet him. My family do not know him."

"I am sorry you are going," said Oscar.

"Walk with me as far as the hotel," said Hubert Forest-Hay, who by this time bitterly repented what he had said.

He was one of those men who would sooner do a good turn than a bad one. In his heart he had a great liking for Lord Ryvers, and would not have done him any harm. He had spoken without thinking ; it had never occurred to him that his old friend was living under any disguise.

As they walked through the quiet streets, the moon shining brightly and throwing quaint graceful shadows on the white roads, Hubert Forest-Hay turned to his companion.

"It is a strong case against Lord Ryvers, I must admit," he said ; "but he was always the very soul of honor. I can remember some cases in which he was chivalrous, I may even say Quixotic. It will be far more prudent for you to say nothing of what you have discovered or what you suspect."

"If there has been anything wrong or underhand, he deserves to be shot, even though he were the descendant of a hundred earls!" declared Oscar, hotly. "She is the most beautiful, just as she is the most simple and innocent of girls."

"We will try to think there is nothing wrong," said his companion ; but I wish with all my heart I had never seen this place, or, at least, had never seen my old friend in it. Good night, Mr. Carstone, and pray remember that in this instance, as in every other, discretion is the better part of valor, or, if I may quote a little proverb, 'Speech is silver, but silence is gold.'"

CHAPTER XXII.

OSCAR CARSTONE returned to the ballroom. He could hardly realize even now all that had happened. He was not like his father, "a dear lover of a lord," but he had a certain amount of respect for the nobility. He felt half bewildered when he remembered how he had disliked the man, how he had treated him with something like contempt, as being of decided social inferiority—and, after all, he was the wealthy Lord Ryvers of Ryverswell. All that had appeared a mystery was clear to him now—the fees to servants, the free expenditure of money ; all that had seemed strange to him in an artist was now easily understood in a wealthy nobleman.

"How astounded my mother and father would be if they knew it!" he thought.

He could not even form an idea as to why Lord Ryvers should be living there under an assumed name, his marriage a secret from the whole world. It was a weighty secret for him to hold, and for some time he held it well. He went back to the ballroom ; but he did not seek Mrs. Randolph now ; he was content to watch her from the other end of the room, and watch her in wonder.

If she had been in any way deceived, if her marriage were not legal, then Lord Ryvers was certainly the greatest villain under the sun. But, looking at the girl's queenly face, his doubts and suspicions in some measure died. No one would dare deceive her. She was too beautiful, too queenly. But yet, if the marriage had been a perfectly lawful marriage, why was he lying here under a false name? Why was he so desirous of keeping everything from observation? Why not meet his friends? Why not tell his family of his marriage?

Lord Ryvers, who knew nothing of what had passed, teased his wife on the defection of her admirer.

"My frowns are as successful as your smiles," he said. "Your smiles attract, my frowns repel."

"I do not see why you wish to repel Mr. Carstone," she returned, gravely. "You must remember what you promised me."

"If he would always keep his distance as he has done to-night, I should not find him so objectionable."

But Violet would not listen. He had promised to be courteous and civil to the Carstones. She would not let him laugh at them.

"Madame looks magnificent to-night," said Lord Ryvers. "The ruby velvet train is a really artistic touch, Violet."

"She is a kind, good woman, Randolph, and she looks nice because she is good. You shall not laugh at her!" cried Violet.

"That is a new idea of the fashion-books," he said. "But I am not laughing. Who would laugh at such a gorgeous dame? I cannot quite understand your friend to-night; he seems to avoid me," he went on. "He looks strangely at me, and his manner is different. But why need I trouble myself about him?"

"Why, indeed!" laughed Violet. "I was just thinking so."

"Have you nearly had enough of this, Violet?" he asked. "I shall be glad when it is time to go."

"Not yet," she cried, with such fervor that he was amused—"not yet, I am so happy, and I have so many partners."

"Be happy then, my darling," he said. "Enjoy yourself in your own bright fashion."

An hour later Lord Ryvers found himself near Mrs. Carstone, to whom also the evening had been a delightful one. She was vigorously using her fan, and looked up at him as he passed.

"I have had a very pleasant time, Mr. Randolph," she said. "I have met some really nice people."

But Lord Ryvers was not sufficiently interested to ask who the people were; so that, for some time at least, he did not know the discoverer of his secret.

"How much your wife has been admired!" Mrs. Carstone continued.

"Not half so much as she deserves to be," he replied, laughingly.

And Mrs. Carstone thought to herself, "There is a great deal of good, after all, in the young man."

Violet looked fresh as the morning breaking in the skies when they returned to their hotel.

Richard Carstone had been very much impressed by the ball: he had had a glimpse of a new world, and he had

found that there were many things money could never purchase.

Mrs. Carstone had enjoyed herself supremely ; she had talked to Lady Forest-Hay, and had been introduced to several ladies whom she had long desired to know. But Oscar was strangely silent. He hardly spoke in answer to any remarks that were made to him. His silence continued until the next day at noon. He had a desperate struggle with himself. He felt that the proper and manly thing to do was to keep silence with regard to a secret of which he had accidentally gained possession. Then he pictured to himself his mother's wonder and his father's consternation were he to reveal what he knew ; and finally he decided to tell his mother, come what might, and she might please herself as to what use she would make of her knowledge.

It so happened that Mrs. Carstone quite inadvertently led up to the subject.

"Oscar," she said, when she found herself alone with her son for a few moments, "you seem very absent this morning ; and you were very strange last evening. Will you tell me what is wrong ?"

"I was just on the point of confiding in you," he answered. "The fact is, I have discovered a secret."

He uttered the last word in such a portentous and important tone that Mrs. Carstone turned pale.

"A secret!" she cried. "Oh, my dear, Oscar, what is it ?"

"Hush, mother ! Remember, walls have ears," he said ; "and no one must hear one syllable of what I have to say."

"My dear boy, what can be the matter ?" Mrs. Carstone asked, in some alarm.

"Come out on the terrace with me," he said ; "no one will overhear us there."

Mother and son went out together. Mrs. Carstone laid her hand on her son's arm as they walked slowly up and down, for Oscar appeared in no haste to impart his news.

"I have discovered a secret," he said, at length, "and one that seems to me of great importance. I was advised not to mention the subject ; but I must tell you."

"You are quite right, Oscar," his mother declared, decisively. "You may rely upon my prudence. I always

say to your dear father that women are the safest confidantes, after all. What is your secret?"

"I hardly know how to tell you," he replied. "I have never been so surprised in all my life. You know that we have none of us liked Mr. Randolph, as he calls himself. We thought he gave himself great airs and graces."

"So he does," agreed Mrs. Carstone.

"Who in the world do you think he turns out to be, mother?"

"Himself, I should say," she replied. "My dear Oscar, who else could he be?"

"Mother, you will be astonished. He is no artist—at least, he is not a professional artist; he is Lord Ryvers of Ryverswell, one of the richest men in England."

"Lord Ryvers!" she gasped. "Lord Ryvers! And we have been so uncivil to him! Oh, Oscar, what shall we do, what shall we do?"

"I am not concerned with regard to ourselves, mother," he replied. "It is this which troubles me—if he is Lord Ryvers, who is the beautiful girl he calls Mrs. Randolph?"

"Oh, my dear," cried Mrs. Carstone, piteously, "what can you mean? Surely no harm to bright, beautiful Violet—surely none to her!"

"I do not know. I hope not, mother. But I want to know what you think about it. The whole matter has to me a very awkward look. This man is really Lord Ryvers of Ryverswell. He has several fine estates, is reputed to be enormously rich, and holds a very high position. Now, why should he be living here under an assumed name? When people take a false name, it is because they want to deceive some one. The question is, whom does he wish to deceive or mislead?"

"My dear Oscar, how clever you are!" cried the perturbed lady. "How well you argue the point!"

"The only person I can see he deceives is bright, beautiful Violet, as you call her, mother. It is quite evident that she is ignorant of all these things. She does not know his name, his rank, or anything about him. She believes him to be an artist working hard for his living. The question is, why has he deceived her? And I fear there can be but one answer."

"What an awful thing!" cried the kind-hearted woman.

• I have always heard that young noblemen are very foolish and willful ; but, Oscar, he seems such a good man ! ”

“ Seeming and being are different things, mother,” replied Oscar, sententiously. “ What is your own opinion ? If everything be quite right and straightforward, what need of disguise ? ”

“ Very true. Oh, Oscar, what a lawyer you would have made ! ”

“ Never mind me, mother ; I want you to think of this girl, not of me. If she has been cruelly deceived, as it seems to me she must have been, is it not our duty to open her eyes ? ”

But Mrs. Carstone looked very grave.

“ Do you think it does any good to try to open people’s eyes ? ” she said. “ I am not very wise, my dear, or very clever ; but I have learned one thing from experience, and it is not to interfere with other people’s affairs.”

“ That is right enough in the abstract, mother ; but this is a peculiar case. What would you think if Mrs. Randolph, as we have learned to call her, were a daughter of your own ? You must do to her what you would wish any Christian, under similar circumstances, to do to a daughter of yours. My firm belief is that the marriage, even granting that there has been one, is illegal, and that he knows it. If it be so, it is our duty, mother, to rescue the girl ; it is indeed.”

“ How can we rescue her ? ” asked Mrs. Carstone “ I — ”

“ You must do it, mother,” he cried, vehemently. “ How can we sit by in silence while we see such deceit practiced upon a helpless girl ? ”

“ But, Oscar, perhaps she knows ; perhaps they have some reason for concealing their rank and position which they do not choose to make known. I thought fashionable people—great people, I mean—often traveled under another name, so as to avoid all fuss and ceremony.”

“ Royalty does that. It is hardly probable that an English lord would give himself the trouble. In fact, mother, be as charitable as I may, I find no other solution of the difficulty but this—that Lord Ryvers has chosen to hide his name and rank purposely to deceive that beautiful girl. If such be the case, it is right that the fraud should be exposed. Your own reason, your own sense, must tell

you so, mother. We could not let any one go straight to ruin in that fashion without trying at least to save them, could we?"

"Let us tell your father, Oscar, and see what he says," said Mrs. Carstone. "I do not remember ever feeling so utterly bewildered in my life before."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"TELL her?" cried Richard Carstone. "Why, most certainly she ought to know! She must know! My dear," he continued, turning suddenly to his wife, "you are the person to do it. Women understand women best. You must manage it. I could not as an Englishman stand by silently while so cruel a wrong was perpetrated. The girl may be motherless, she may be friendless; it is our duty to interfere."

And, when Richard Carstone once became convinced that to do a thing was his duty, he did it.

"I dread to undertake such a task," said Mrs. Carstone. "Suppose it is all right—she will be angry that we have suspected anything; so will he. She will be sure to tell him. And, on the other hand, if it be all wrong, what am I to do with her? She will break her heart."

"Nonsense!" said her husband, curtly. "This is no time for hesitation or to be influenced by fine scruples. I hope you will make an opportunity for seeing Mrs. Randolph to-day, and get to know, first of all, whether she understands her true position. Indeed you must lose no time about it. Try to see her this morning."

Fate favored Mrs. Carstone. Lord Ryvers went to a neighboring town to make some purchases, and Violet, as she always did in his absence, came to see her new friend. The color and light faded out of that lady's face when she saw her, for she did not like her task.

"You are not well, Mrs. Carstone," said Violet, after the first greetings were over. "I am glad that I have a few hours to spare this morning. My husband has gone to purchase some wonderful paints."

"And you have come to spend your leisure time with me," said Mrs. Carstone. "That is really good of you. Shall we go out? The sun shines, but it is not too warm."

There was a little green square amongst the orange-trees, where a large vine had been trained over pretty trellis-work, and little stands and chairs had been placed underneath. Here Mrs. Carstone paused.

"Sit down, my dear," she said. "I cannot walk far to-day."

Violet wondered a little at her strange manner—it was so nervous, so timid, so unlike Mrs. Carstone's usual kind, unconcerned way. And, above all other topics, Mrs. Carstone chose to speak of her wedding-day.

"We always keep up the anniversary of our wedding-day," she said. "We have quite a little *fête*. Do you, Mrs. Randolph? I think it is a very nice custom for all married people to observe."

"I have had but one anniversary," she replied, with a smile, "but I quite agree with you, it is a very pleasant custom. I must tell my husband that we also must plan a *fête* for next year."

"My dear," said Mrs. Carstone, trying to speak carelessly, "what is your husband's Christian name?"

"Randolph," Violet replied—"the same as his surname."

"That is a strange thing—very unusual, I should imagine," observed Mrs. Carstone.

"Yes, it is unusual," said Violet. "I knew Philip Philips, and I have read of an Owen Owen."

"Speaking of names and marriage," said Mrs. Carstone, "what was your maiden name?"

"Beaton;" replied Violet; "I am always proud of my name, because it is in the old ballad:

"There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael, and me."

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Carstone, with something of awe, "do you really belong to a family so ancient as that?"

"No," laughed Violet; "I should say not. 'Beaton' is by no means an uncommon name. I have never thought as to whether I was descended from the Beatons mentioned in the song or not."

Still Mrs. Carstone felt that she was no nearer the knowledge she wished to obtain.

"I was married at St. John's, in the City," she said. "Where were you married, Mrs. Randolph?"

Violet, who knew of no necessity for keeping the circumstances connected with her marriage a secret, answered readily enough :

" In one of the prettiest of old churches—at St. Byno's where I lived."

" Then she was married," thought Mrs. Carstone. " Tell me about your wedding," she continued; " I like to hear about love-stories and weddings." But her hands trembled as she spoke, and there was great anxiety in her eyes.

" There was nothing very remarkable attending my wedding," said Violet. " Mr. Randolph and I were married on the twenty-second of September, and it was one of the loveliest days that even a poet could imagine."

" And you were very happy, my dear?" she said, gently.

" Yes, very happy. The only drawback to my happiness was that my aunt, with whom I had always lived, detested men, love, lovers, and marriage. She prophesied the most terrible things for me."

" None of them have come true, I hope?" said Mrs. Carstone.

" No," laughed Violet, blithely, " not one of them; and they never will."

" Your aunt went to your wedding with you, I suppose?" said Mrs. Carstone.

" Yes, she was present, but, as Mr. Randolph said afterward, it was like a Death's-head at a feast. She never smiled, and she looked profoundly miserable all the time."

" It must be all right," thought Mrs. Carstone. " This aunt was evidently a keen woman. If there had been any flaw in the proposal, she would gladly have seized upon it. Certainly there must have been a marriage. The only question that remains is whether it was a legal one."

" Why did you marry an artist?" she asked, as though the idea had suddenly occurred to her.

But there was no consciousness on Violet's face as she answered :

" It must have been my fate."

Evidently she had no idea that her husband was anything but an artist.

" You must forgive me if I say that, with your beautiful face, you might have done much better. You might have married a lord."

"A lord!" cried Violet, with indignant scorn. "I would not have married a lord to have saved my life."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Carstone, wonderingly.

"I hate all aristocrats!" cried Violet. "So did my aunt; she brought me up to hate them."

"How strange!" said Mrs. Carstone.

But she never thought of the connecting link. It did not occur to her that perhaps Lord Ryvers had hidden his name and title to win his wife. She looked at the beautiful face that would have graced any station.

"Do you know, Mrs. Randolph," she said, "you are quite an original character? You are unlike any one I have ever met."

Then her doubts assailed her again. That marriage could not have been legal, or why had Lord Ryvers kept it so secret?

"I do not see that I differ from others," Violet replied, "except that I have strong likes and dislikes, and I am true to them."

Mrs. Carstone did not believe that such a thing was possible as a true dislike to the aristocracy. It made no impression on her. Her one desire now was to find out if the marriage were legal or not.

"Do you visit your husband's family at all?" she said, trying to speak as though the idea had occurred to her quite accidentally.

"No," was the girl's reply. "I do not know anything of them. My husband has never spoken to me of them."

"That seems strange," said Mrs. Carstone; "but of course they know he is married."

"I do not know. It is a subject we have never discussed, Mrs. Carstone."

"A young husband is generally so proud to introduce his wife to his friends. It is one of the first things of which he would think. My husband was delighted, I remember, to take me home."

"I have never thought of it," replied Violet. "I should think my husband is very much like myself, almost alone in the world."

And again Mrs. Carstone felt at a loss what to say.

"Do you think—have you any reason to think that your husband has married without the knowledge of his family?" she inquired.

"No," laughed Violet; "I have not thought of his family, nor do I think that he himself has. I must ask him."

"Would it vex you to find that he had done so?" Mrs. Carstone asked.

"No, I do not think it would," replied Violet. "I should feel sure that he had some reason for it. If he had relatives living for whom he cared, he would have talked about them."

"Has your husband always been an artist?" the other pursued.

"Yes, so far as I know. At least, he must have been: he is so young now, and he has been studying all his life. He could not have been anything else."

"You do not seem to know much of his past, my dear," remarked Mrs. Carstone.

"Mrs. Carstone," the girl said, suddenly, "you have something to tell me. All these questions and suggestions make me feel quite sure of it. You are, as Mr. Carstone would say, beating about the bush. Now, tell me at once what it means."

There was an energy, a vivacity about her, which considerably startled Mrs. Carstone, and made her feel at a loss how to continue the subject.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"You are so quick, my dear," said Mrs. Carstone. "You must give me time to think and to speak. You must not hurry me."

"Then you have something to tell me!" cried Violet. "I felt quite sure of it. What is it, Mrs. Carstone?"

"I do not like my task at all. I would not have undertaken it, but that my husband and son insisted upon it."

"Your husband and son!" said Violet, proudly. "What have they to do with me?"

"Nothing; but they felt that the mystery ought to be cleared up."

"What mystery? There is no mystery concerning me," said the young girl, more proudly still.

"Unfortunately there is a very unmistakable mystery," replied Mrs. Carstone.

Then Violet rose from her pretty garden-chair, and stood, erect and haughty, before her companion.

" You must say more, now that you have said so much," she declared. " To my mind, the very word ' mystery ' is distasteful, and I am proud to say that there is none attached to me."

She stood erect and haughty enough, most fair to see, her dress of pale blue sweeping the ground in graceful folds, the slanting sunbeams falling on her golden hair and beautiful face—a face flushed now with indignation. The proud, sweet lips trembled, and the white hands toying with the vine-leaves were not quite steady.

" Now, Mrs. Carstone, what is the mystery ? " she persisted.

" If you are going to be angry with me," said Mrs. Carstone, " I cannot tell you all."

And she looked so distressed that Violet's heart smote her.

" I am not angry," she replied. " Why should I be ? I am quite sure of one thing—you would not do or say anything knowingly to hurt me."

" I wish I knew how to tell you in such words that could not annoy you. Perhaps you will think it is not my business, and that I need not have spoken. Still it seems right that you should know. Mrs. Randolph, your husband is not what he seems to be."

Violet's face grew paler and prouder.

" In what way ? " she asked, " I will believe nothing but what is good of him."

" He is not what he seems to be," repeated Mrs. Carstone. " He calls himself ' Mr. Randolph,' and he professes to be an artist, in both respects acting untruthfully. Your husband's name is not ' Randolph,' neither is he an artist."

" Who and what is he, then ? " asked the girl, in a low, hoarse voice.

It seemed to her impossible that he should be anything but the gallant, loyal lover she had always known.

" He is Lord Ryvers, of Ryversdale, one of the wealthiest men in England."

The effect Mrs. Carstone's words produced was quite different from what she expected. The beautiful face before her grew white to the very lips, and the light died from the violet eyes.

"I do not believe it!" the girl gasped, at length. "I will not believe it! I should hate him if it were true!"

"It is as true as that the sun shines in the heavens," replied Mrs. Carstone.

"I will not believe it!" Violet repeated.

"It is most positively true," said Mrs. Carstone. "He is Randolph Lord Ryvers, and he belongs to one of the grandest old families in England; he is a thorough aristocrat."

"An aristocrat!" cried the girl; and the word, as it came from her lips, was worse than a sneer. "I—I hate them!" she gasped. "I will not believe it."

"It seems to me that, if I had told you your husband was a thief, or a forger, instead of a nobleman, you could not be more angry," said Mrs. Carstone.

"I should not be one half so angry," declared her companion. "You cannot understand; you have not been trained as I have been. Hatred of all such runs with the blood in my veins."

"It is very foolish," Mrs. Carstone said, astonished: "there is no sense nor reason in it."

But Violet flashed a look from her grand eyes which almost silenced her.

"You cannot understand," she said, loftily.

And Mrs. Carstone felt that she spoke the truth. Such sentiments as Violet had uttered were beyond her comprehension. The girlish, graceful figure was drawn up to its full height; the flashing eyes looked down upon her.

"Why do you say this of my husband?" she asked
"And who has told you?"

Mrs. Carstone repeated the story exactly as she had heard it. An old college friend of Lord Ryvers had recognized him, and had gone away lest any complication or unpleasantness should arise through his recognition.

"I do not believe one word of it," declared Violet, emphatically, when Mrs. Carstone had finished her recital. "He has been deceived by Mr. Randolph's resemblance to some one else he knows. Such a thing frequently happens. It is easier for me to believe every man in the world mistaken than to doubt the honor and integrity of my own husband." And in that moment, while she was defending him, she cared more for him than she had ever done. "The more I think of it," she said, "the more sure I feel that I

"Right. My husband would never have won me by fraud."

Mrs. Carstone looked at her with profound pity. How little she suspected even what might possibly await her!

"It is out of their true liking and affection for you that my husband and son desire that you should understand your position. If it be true that your husband has married you in this secret fashion, that he is living here under a false name and is hiding, you must ask yourself what is the motive."

"He can have no motive," replied Violet; "therefore I say it is untrue."

"You will be compelled to believe what I have told you on proper authority," said Mrs. Carstone. "Ask yourself why your husband should live in such seclusion. There must be a reason for it; there must be a reason for his avoidance of all English people."

"I will not believe it!" reiterated Violet.

Yet, when she remembered how he had in all truth avoided mixing in English society, her heart sunk.

"I must tell you frankly," continued Mrs. Carstone, seeing that hints and allusions were all in vain, "that my husband and my son are afraid for you."

"Afraid of what?" asked her companion, wonderingly.

And the kindly woman, who had found her task so much more difficult than she had expected, shrank from the flash of the glorious eyes.

"When a rich young nobleman hides his rank and his name, assumes a disguise—acts, in fact as your husband has acted—there is but one interpretation to be placed upon his conduct."

"And what is that?" asked Violet, so proudly that Mrs. Carstone was almost afraid to answer.

"I had better tell you," she replied, "though I know you will be angry. I cannot help it. You ought to know; you must know. When a man acts as your husband has acted, the inference is that either he is not married at all, or that his marriage is not legal. Any one who heard the story would form the same opinion."

It was the white heat of rage that changed the beautiful face of the woman who listened into something almost too terrible to behold. Yet she controlled herself, though her lips were white, and quivered as she spoke.

"Do you mean to tell me," she said, "that any one lives who dares throw even the least shadow of doubt on my marriage?"

"My dear Mrs. Randolph, you must be calm and listen. Every one who hears your story will draw the same conclusion that we have done."

"Then the world is a vile wicked place, and the people in it are vile and wicked, too. My marriage was as legal, as honorable, and as secure as though I had been a queen."

"Then it has been a foolish thing to make all this mystery about it," said Mrs. Carstone. "One thing is quite certain—your husband's friends know nothing of it. They have, if all be true that I hear, very different views for him. You know, of course, that there are some formalities in the marriages of noblemen under age. I cannot tell what they are—I only know that they exist—and it is just possible that in your case they have not been complied with."

"Why should any one think that? Why suspect it?"

"Because of the mystery," replied Mrs. Carstone. "If all were as it should be, why need your marriage have been performed so privately? I do not say there is anything wrong; but I do think appearances are so much against you that those who have the truest interest in you should make inquiries, and see that all is right."

"No one is interested in me," said Violet, "except my Aunt Alice—and she is far away."

"I beg your pardon," rejoined Mrs. Carstone, "we are all interested in you—my husband, my son, and myself. We are your true friends; we would do anything to serve you. My husband was most indignant when he heard what an imposition had been practiced upon you. If you will give him authority, he will sift the matter for you and will give himself just as much trouble as if you were his own daughter."

"You are very kind," said Violet, proudly; "but I need no assistance; I have my husband. Nothing will ever shake my faith in him."

"Let me find Mr. Carstone, and then he can advise you," said Mrs. Carstone. "We have been talking about you all the morning. I assure you that our only anxiety is to serve you"

"I am grateful to you. My husband will serve me. No, you need not send for either Mr. Carstone or your son. I was startled when you spoke to me at first; I have recovered from my surprise. My trust is in my husband. I feel sure the whole story is a mistake—a case of mistaken identity, I should think."

"I am afraid you will not find it so."

"I shall go to my husband at once," continued Violet, heedless of the interruption. "I have never heard him speak one false word. I will repeat to him all that you have told me and ask him to let me know the truth. He will not deceive me." She was hastening away, when she turned suddenly to Mrs. Carstone. "Whatever happens," she added, "I must thank you. You have done what you thought kind and wise. You mean to befriend me, but I am sure there is a mistake." She raised her head with the proud gesture of an insulted queen. "I shall come back to tell you what nonsense it is. I do not know whether my husband will laugh or be angry at the idea of being mistaken for an English nobleman."

As she crossed the grounds and re-entered the hotel, she laughed contemptuously at the idea. He who loved her so, who worshiped her, who had tried so hard to win her—he to have deceived her! It was absurd!

She had an hour to wait before Lord Ryvers came in, and, as she sat watching from the window of her room, she thought of all that had happened; and at the end of that time her faith was so far shaken that she felt it would be a pleasure to hear his denial.

Suddenly she saw him coming. She hastened to meet him.

"Come straight to my room, Randolph!" she cried, eagerly. "I have something to say to you—something a thousand times more important than life or death to me."

Then husband and wife stood face to face with the great question of their lives at issue between them.

CHAPTER XXV.

LORD RYVERS wondered at his wife's strange haste and excited manner; she was pale, trembling, and agitated. When they had entered her room, she closed the door carefully behind her, and then stood against it. He held

out his arms as though he wished to embrace her. She repelled him by a proud gesture that startled him.

" You must not touch me!" she cried. " I have something to ask you which is more important to me than life or death. Tell me, tell me," she continued, with eager, flashing eyes, " was my marriage with you perfectly legal and in accordance with all the forms necessary?"

" Most certainly it was," he answered.

" I did not doubt it!" she exclaimed. " Always remember that I did not doubt it. Others have done so; I did not. That doubt and myself would never have lived one minute. You have answered me one question; answer another. Are you Randolph Randolph, an artist, painting for your daily bread, or are you Lord Ryvers of Ryverswell, a noble and wealthy baron? Answer me."

But he was so startled that he shrunk a few paces from her; his face, usually so bright and debonair, grew white and lowering, his eyes filled with an angry light.

" Why do you speak to me in this fashion? What do you mean?" he asked.

" That is no answer to my question," she replied. " Are you an artist or a nobleman?"

Her eyes were fixed intently on him. They seemed to hold him so that he could not look away from her.

" I am both," he said, drawing a deep breath.

" You are Lord Ryvers?"

" I am Lord Ryvers, my darling; but I am your true lover and true husband in spite of that."

" Then it is true," she cried, wringing her hands with a gesture of despair. " It is true—and I swore it was false! If you have deceived me in one thing, you have doubtless deceived me in more."

" I have not deceived you, Violet, darling. Do not look so horrified. There is nothing the matter. I merely suppressed the truth. I told no lie."

" I see no difference," she declared. " If you would do one thing, you would do another."

" Be reasonable, Violet. I have done you no harm," he said, gently.

" You have done me harm; you have deceived me. If I had known you were Lord Ryvers, I would not have married you. You have made me false to the habit and training and teaching of my whole life; you have made

me false to every instinct of my own heart; you have married me by fraud. I shall leave you; I will not remain with you."

She looked so beautiful in her indignation that he only loved her the more.

" You have married me by fraud," she repeated—" you who professed to be the most honorable, the most loyal of men!"

" Will you listen to reason, Violet?" he asked.

" There is no reason in it," she replied, growing more angry as she saw him growing more pained.

" You speak as though I had injured you, Violet," he said.

" You have done so. You have injured me in a way I shall never forget. You have taken from me my own self-esteem; you have made me false to all my thoughts, ideas, and instincts; you have placed me in a false position; you have exposed me to almost unbearable insult and comment. Do you know what those who know your secret are saying?"

" How should I know?"

" I will tell you," she cried, with a burning blush that rose even to the roots of her golden hair. " I am ashamed to repeat the words, but I was compelled to listen to them. I, the girl you affected to worship, have been exposed to insult; I have had to listen when those who knew of your disguise wondered whether my marriage were legal or not. Do you think I shall ever forget that disgrace or recover from it?"

His face grew perfectly white, and a look such as she had never seen upon it before spread over it. It was deeper than pride, more bitter than contempt; it was more of outraged dignity than anger; it was the expression of a man mortally wounded.

" Who has spoken so?" he asked.

" Those who found out your disguise," she replied.

" Who are they, Violet?" asked Lord Ryvers.

And she told him the whole story as it had been related to her. He listened attentively.

" My old schoolfellow, Forest-Hay!" he said. " A stone thrown by the hand of a friend cuts doubly sharp. Why did he not come to me? Could he possibly imagine that

there was anything in common between such people as the Carstones and me?"

"Such people as the Carstones do not marry under false names," she retorted. "Of what use is a title to a man who is not a gentleman?"

"Do you mean that I am not a gentleman, Violet?" he asked.

"Not in my eyes—and you never will be again," she replied, angrily. "You have deceived me and subjected me to insult; you have placed me in an utterly false position. I repeat that no gentleman would behave in such a manner to the girl he loved."

"I have not consciously or willingly exposed you to insult," he said, slowly. "The suspicions you have named would arise only in coarse minds. One word from me will disperse all these foolish doubts as the wind disperses vapor. Violet, believe me, they are not worth resenting. It is only people like the Carstones who would think of such a thing."

"Your own friend evidently had his ideas on the subject," said Violet, proudly, "or he would not have gone away."

"My friend in a——. Well, it is useless to blame him. I wish that he had spoken to me instead of to Mr. Carstone. You seem very angry, Violet, even more so than I feared you would be when you learned who I really am."

"I am so angry," she cried, "that from this time all is over between us! I consented to be the wife of an artist, of a man equal to myself in position, who would have to work for his living, and to whom I could be a helpmate. I never consented to be the wife of a rich nobleman—nor will I. My feeling on the matter is so strong that I would rather die!"

"My darling, do not say such cruel words."

"I mean them," she declared. "You seem to forget that from my very cradle I have been taught to hate and despise the class to which you belong. See how right my aunt was, after all, in teaching me that people of your position are not to be trusted! You are an aristocrat. What have you done? Deceived a very ignorant girl, taken advantage of inexperience and innocence!"

"Violet," said Lord Ryvers, gently, "do you not know that all class hatred is wrong? It is utterly impossible for

all men to be equal; as long as the world stands there must be different grades of society."

"I acknowledge no such thing," she replied. "I never disguised my sentiments from you, and you ought to have respected them."

"Violet," he said, with a gentle patience she would have admired in any one else—"Violet, darling, listen to me. I was your faithful lover from the happy day in June when I first met you, dear, until the day in September when you became my wife. Was it not so?"

"Yes," she answered.

"During that time, when, my darling, for your sweet sake I gave up the whole world, when my life was but one dream of you, did you see anything wrong in me, anything to condemn?"

Almost reluctantly she answered "No."

"Did you find me untruthful, unfaithful, light of purpose, light of love, mean, ungenerous, false, wanting in courage? Think before you answer."

And again she said "No."

"I thank you," he replied. "We have been married rather more than a year. During that period have you seen anything in me to dislike, to despise, or condemn?"

"No," she replied, "I have not—honestly, I have not."

"Until to-day I had your love and respect?"

"Yes," she admitted, "you had both."

"To-day you find out that I am a nobleman, and not an artist, and you withdraw all that you have given me, and intend to leave me. I am the same man I was yesterday—my moral and mental qualities have not changed in the least; yet, because I have more money than you thought, you talk of leaving me. Is it just?"

"You are not just," she replied. "It is not because you have more money than I thought that I—I shall leave you. It is because you have deceived me. That is the thing I can never forgive."

Still he lost none of his gentle patience.

"I loved you, Violet," he said. "The moment my eyes fell upon your face you became the one woman in the wide world for me. I lost sight of everything else. I saw you, my darling—only you."

But Violet listened unmoved. He had deceived her, and she was one of those who never forgave an act of deceit.

"I loved you so much," he said, "that to have lost you would have been worse than death. Death is the end of all pain; life with an unhappy love is all torture. When I thought that I might fail in winning you, I could not work, or eat, or sleep, or rest. Oh, Violet, believe me, darling, that no man has ever loved a woman as I love you!"

"Still you deceived me," she reiterated, in a cold, clear tone.

"Answer me just one question, Violet," he said, pleadingly. "If you had known that I was, what I most unfortunately am, Lord Ryvers of Ryversdale, would you have married me?"

"No," she answered, quickly; "you know that I would not have married you."

"Then you do not love me so very much, Violet, after all," he said, sadly—"not half so much as I love you. Oh, my darling, I thought I had all your heart!"

Some wives would have relented at once; but Violet's beautiful face grew colder and harder. Her heart was not touched in the least; her pride was aroused and all in arms. She could think but of one thing—he had deceived her. There could be no extenuation of that fact.

"Violet," he cried, despairingly, "I did not think a young girl could be so cruel. I know women of the world often are; they enjoy the misery and torture of men; some of them walk through life over the bleeding hearts of men. One expects cruelty from such; but you, fresh of heart as you are fair of face—one could not expect cruelty from you."

"I am not cruel; I am only just," she replied.

"Then may Heaven preserve you from such justice!" he cried. "If I had injured you, if I had brought you to poverty or to worse, if I had offered to you a tarnished name, you could not have been more angry."

"The chances are I should not have cared so much," she replied.

"But, my darling, this must not be," he said, earnestly; "you must forgive me. You cannot be so cruel as to punish me my whole life long for one act of deception, when that deception was practiced solely and entirely for the sake of winning you."

"You could never be the same to me again," she replied, coldly. "I could never like you as much as I did."

"I will not believe you," said Lord Ryvers. "You cannot change in one day from a loving, gentle-hearted girl into a cold, heartless woman."

"I am only taking example by you!" she cried, angrily. "In one day you have changed from an honest artist to a dishonest nobleman! Am I worse than you?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

LORD RYVERS went up to his wife. She was standing with her hands clasped; he took them gently in his own. She would have resisted, but in any struggle, however slight, she would have had little chance. So now she merely turned away her face. In spite of his sorrow and dismay, he smiled. It was so exactly the action of a forward, willful child.

"You will not let me look into your face, Violet?" he said. "Come with me. You need not stand like a sentinel at the door. Come and let me talk to you."

He took her to the great bay-window, where they could see the grand sweep of water and the blue sky above it. Perhaps he thought the golden sunshine and the song of the birds might soften her heart; but they did not.

"Violet," he said, "will you forgive me? This is my only sin against you, and it was committed solely for love of you. You see there could have been no other motive. Will you forgive me?"

She raised to his a face white as snow, cold as ice, frozen.

"I have told you," she said, "that you can never be the same to me again."

"But will you forgive me?" he persisted. "I am sorry now. If the time were to come over again, I would not do it. I see now that it would have been much better had I told you the truth and left my fate in your hands; but it did not seem so to me then. Violet, my darling wife, will you forgive me?"

"I may forgive you," she said; "but you will never be the same to me again—never. I have lost my faith in you; it will never return."

"How cold you are to me, my wife! Still I love you the more. I know that most girls would be overwhelmed with delight at finding themselves mistress of Ryversdale. I bow to the nobility of character that passes all such advan-

ages by. I love you better, angry, indignant, and scornful as you are, than if you had cried out for joy. But do not let this part us. We have a long life, I hope, before us. Forgive me."

Still there was no softening in the violet eyes, and the lines round the mouth grew more firm. She was thinking to herself how he must have laughed at her when she had been anxious concerning money, when she had called him to account for lavishing valuable presents on her. The thought of it brought a flush to her face and made her eyes flash angrily.

" You must have found me very easy to deceive."

" Oh, Violet," he cried, " you stab me to the heart, my dear ! Let me tell you a little story. I had a schoolfellow —true he was many years older than I—but as a little lad often loves a big one I loved him. His name was Charlie Anchester, and he was heir to the Earldom of Atherleigh. He succeeded to it before I left school. He fell in love with one of the most beautiful girls of the day, Lady Maud Trevor, and they were married. He worshiped her ; but soon after their marriage he found out that she had never cared for him, that she had loved a penniless young captain in the army, and had married Lord Atherleigh for his money. He was a gentle, sensitive, loving-hearted man, and it broke his heart, Violet ; he could not recover from it. He tried to take his place in the world, he tried hard to live for other things, but it was impossible ; and, when he was dying, he sent for me to say good-by, he had always been so fond of me. The doctors had given some long Latin name to his disease, and they said he was dying of it ; but he was not. His ailment was a broken heart. He told me so—me, his little schoolfellow, the little lad he loved—when I went to see him. I was just eighteen years of age then, and it made a great impression upon me. I remember the expression on his face, the pain in his eyes, the pitiful voice ; I remember the room, and the sunlight that came through the window and fell upon the floor. He called me to him ; his hands were so thin and white. He took mine in his. ' Randolph,' he said, ' my little schoolfellow, I am going to die, and I have sent for the little lad I loved so well to whisper one word of warning in his ear.' He drew my face down to his. ' You will be a rich man some day, Randolph ; mind what I say to you. Let no

woman marry you for your money. Marry some one who loves you for yourself alone. To be married for money or rank, without love, is to be cursed. My life has been cursed ; guard yours.' I never forgot the words, Violet—I never shall ; and from that moment I made up my mind, even if I never married at all, I would wait until I met some one who cared for me alone. Listen to me, Violet. Women misjudge men because some poet has chosen to write :

“ ‘ Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart,
‘ Tis woman’s whole existence.’ ”

Every one believes that to be true ; I say it is not true. Love is quite as much to a man as to a woman, often more ; but men say perhaps less about it. Look at my friend ! He died because the woman he loved did not love him. You must not think that all the fret and the fever and the passion of love lies with women ; it does not. Listen to me, Violet. You will not turn your face toward me. How can you be so cold to me when I love you so well ? I began my life with this idea fixed in my mind, that I must be loved and married for myself alone. I went a great deal into society. It is true I was only a youth ; but I understood why people flattered me, why mothers courted me for their daughters. I will not say more ; I have a chivalrous love for all women, and I cannot bear to speak even against the worldly ones. It is enough to say that it was my wealth and title that were the attraction, and not myself ; perhaps with one or two it may have been different. People said, but I never believed them, that Gwendoline Marr would have married me even if I had been penniless. I cannot say ; she was not to my taste.”

Slowly enough the fair head turned, and the beautiful face was raised to his. There was a faint gleam of interest in the violet eyes.

“ Who was Gwendoline Marr ? ” Violet asked.

“ Gwendoline Marr is a wealthy heiress, the daughter of Lord Marr of Marsland, and considered to be the most perfectly beautiful brunette in England.”

“ Why did not you marry her ? ”

“ Because, my darling, I loved and married you. Gwendoline Marr is nothing to me ; I have never cared but for one woman in my life. Now listen to me, Violet. I began

life, as I have told you, with this determination—not to lose my one chance of happiness, but to wait until I found some one to love me for myself. I found there was very little notion of love in my own circle. My eldest sister, a calm, serene woman with a beautiful face, was going to marry the Earl of Lester; and, during all the time I heard my mother discuss that marriage, I never once heard the word ‘love.’ She talked of settlements, of diamonds, of dress, of anything and everything but love. I determined then that, whatever else might be missing at my marriage, love at least should be there. I can safely say, Violet, that my heart was never touched even ever so faintly by any of the beautiful or graceful girls I met in society. I liked Gwendoline Marr. She was a great friend of my sister’s—and my mother liked her. As for love, my heart and soul were sleeping when I met you. I had always been very much attached to my favorite art—painting. I must tell you also that, having been so many years under my mother’s influence and training, I perhaps stood a little more in awe of her than most young men do of their mothers. I told her the one great desire of my heart, which was, before I entered on my life-long duties as heir to a large fortune and estate, to spend one year in a sketching tour, to go where I liked without any ceremony, to stay wherever picturesque scenery attracted me, to have, in fact, a complete and perfect holiday. My mother did not like the idea at all; she declared that she had a foreboding that it would result in no good; but my sister, the Countess of Lester, persuaded her to accede to my request. Was it fate that brought me to St. Byno’s, to find that my wife was waiting for me there? I had no thought at first of deceiving you, as you choose to term it, Violet. True, I thought to myself that I would woo you and win you as a poor man. Then you told me about your strange training, how your aunt had inculcated in you a hatred of the aristocracy. I used to wonder when I heard those beautiful lips uttering such words. It was then I sinned against you, if sin it can be called. Would to Heaven there were no worse! When I asked you one day if you would marry an aristocrat, you answered, ‘No;’ you would rather die. Then what was I to do? I could not endure the thought. I knew your ideas were all nonsense, the result of foolish and mistaken training. So I made up my mind that there

would be no great harm in my keeping the secret of my position from you. I thought, as you grew older and wiser, as you saw more of the world, you would change your views for others more just. In that I sinned against you ; in no other way. Since we have been married I have frequently longed to tell you the truth ; but you have been bitter in your prejudices. See even how you have liked these Carstones and glorified them because they are ‘self-made !’ Now do you think, after all, that I have acted so badly ?”

“ My opinion of what you have done,” she said, “ remains unchanged.”

“ Then you are a cold-hearted, cruel woman, Violet ! ” he cried. “ How can you be so fair and so cold ? I humble myself. I acknowledge that I ought to have told you the truth. I did wrong, yet it seemed to me right at the time. That wrong I ask you to forgive me.”

He looked so handsome, so imploring, that most women would have been glad to forgive him then and there. A world of love shone in his face ; his eyes were filled with a tender light. Perhaps he pleaded too much ; perhaps if he had seemed a little less anxious, his proud beautiful wife would have yielded. As it was, in proportion as he grew more desperate she hardened her heart against him.

“ Violet,” said Lord Ryvers, “ you make me no answer. I will not believe that any woman can be so cruel as to refuse to forgive a sin—if you call it a sin—committed entirely for love of her.”

“ I have told you that I forgive it ; but nothing can ever be the same between us again—nothing.”

“ That is fancy, and a very cruel fancy,” he replied. “ Why, Violet, how unlike you are to other girls ! Most of them would be well pleased to be Lady Ryvers of Ryverswell.”

She flushed crimson at the words.

“ That is not my name,” she cried, angrily. “ I am Mrs. Randolph.”

“ You are not Mrs. Randolph,” he said, with a smile. “ You are the young, beautiful, and beloved Lady Ryvers of Ryverswell.”

But he could have used no words so fatal to his cause as those.

“ If you have anything more to say,” cried Violet, “ if

you wish me to listen, do not call me by that name again. It is hateful to me."

"Hateful! Yet I have given it to you. Oh, Violet, be more just, be less cruel!"

"You cheated me into taking it," she replied. "If any one lives who treats all titles with contempt, it is I. You think so much of a title; it is but an empty word."

"Nay," he interrupted, "it brings honor with it."

"I do not think so. The title of King did not save Charles from the scaffold; the title of Queen did not save Marie-Antoinette's head from the block. A title does not make a man honest, loyal, or true; on the contrary, it is often a license for a bad life."

"You are too bitter, Violet," he said. "Where can a girl so young and fair as you have formed these ideas? It seems incredible to me."

"They are mine, and I cherish them; they are part of myself. I would not be called Lady Ryvers for anything in the wide world."

"You are very hard and bitter in your prejudices," he said; and, as he looked at her, so cold, so proud, he wondered if he had been mistaken in his estimate of her character, if she were less gentle, less amiable, less loving of heart than he had thought. "I do not know my wife," he went on, sorrowfully. "This beautiful woman who will not let me hold her in my arms, who turns her head from me and will not let the light of her eyes fall on me, is not my bright, loving Violet; this proud, cold woman whose lips will not utter one loving word of forgiveness is not surely the girl I learned to love in the woods of St. Byno's! Oh, Violet, speak to me!"

"I do not recognize my husband either," she said; "I married an honest artist."

"And you find an equally honest nobleman," he rejoined.

"I loved the artist, I do not love the nobleman," she declared, hastily.

"I must submit to the inevitable," he said. "I wooed and won you as an artist; now I must begin to woo you in my true character—and I have some hope that I shall win. Violet, promise me one thing—that you will not leave me."

"I shall never again be happy with you," she said, slowly. "I would rather, much rather, go back to my Aunt Alice at St. Byno's."

"It would be of no use," he remarked. "I should follow you and I should pitch my camp in the garden there, and not go away until I had won you a second time. Oh, beautiful Violet, do you not see that Heaven has made you for me?"

"Heaven did not make you for me," she rejoined. "To think that I, who have been proud of my position all my life, should be degraded into a fine lady!"

He smiled at her words; he could not help it!

"If it were not so pitiful, it would be most amusing," he said. "Come, give me that one promise, Violet; I can bear anything else. Tell me that you will not leave me."

"I cannot decide; I must think. I wish to do right, but I have been cruelly deceived. I must look at what my life with you will be like before I tell you if I can bear it. My own opinion is that I cannot. Tell me, now that your secret is discovered, what do you intend doing?"

"I meant to tell you," he said. "I knew that I must tell you before I took you home. I have deferred the evil day, hoping always that you would grow less bitter in your views."

"And I have not done so," put in Violet, coldly. "So that I am indebted to strangers for the information as to who my husband really is."

"Unfortunately so," he said, finding that it was quite impossible to soothe her, and that contradiction only made matters worse. "I formed my plans from the first hour we were married, and I should like to adhere to them. I thought of writing to my mother and sisters, telling them of my marriage and asking them to Ryversdale to meet us. I thought, if you were willing, we would go quietly to Ryversdale, and remain there for some time. It will be a new world for you, and you will want some time to study it."

He winced under the clear, scornful gaze of his wife's proud eyes.

"Have you told either mother or sisters anything of your marriage?" she asked.

"No, not one word," he replied.

"The sooner it is done the better," she said.

His face brightened. This seemed something like a concession.

"I will write this very day," he said, quickly.

"Even then it will be a year too late," remarked Violet.

She would not give him the least advantage. "Then none of your relatives or friends know anything of your marriage or of me?" she added. "I may safely understand that?"

"Yes; but they shall soon all know you," he declared. "I shall be proud—"

"Never mind," she interrupted; "I shall not be proud. Of course they will all hate me. I am poor, I am nobody, and you are a wealthy baron. You have done about the worst thing you could do for yourself in marrying me."

"I have crowned my whole life with happiness, and I have made you my queen," he said.

It was hard work to resist him; but Violet was proud, and she had a little more than her natural share of obstinacy.

"Have you thought," she asked, "what your mother and sisters will think of me?"

"No, I have thought of nothing but you," he replied, "I have not had room in my heart for any one else."

"Tell me all about them," she said, more gently. "I suppose they are quite as prejudiced in their way as I am in mine?"

"Yes, I think so. Not all, though—not Lady Lester. She is not prejudiced. She is one of those grand, serene, calm women, who have no prejudices."

"Tell me all about them," she said; and this time she did not shrink so vehemently from his caressing hand.

"I will begin with my mother," he said; "and I will sketch really faithful portraits for you. My mother," he continued, "is essentially a proud, dignified, stately woman. The one great pride of her life is that she was born an Alton—the Altons, I may tell you, are one of the very oldest families in England."

He saw the delicate brows contract with a frown; still she must hear.

"In my mother, Violet," he continued, "are concentrated all the prides you most dislike—pride of race, of birth, of name. She is tall, with a stately figure, and she moves with dignified grace; there is a certain grandeur about her. She is lavishly generous and kind to all her servants and dependents. She thinks much of appearances and of the world; she rejoices in splendor, and knows nothing of the dark side of life; she has a grand, condescending fashion of dealing with her inferiors; she was a most excellent wife;

she has been a most devoted mother. You will find her still a beautiful woman, although she is no longer young. Do you like the sketch, Violet?" he asked, anxiously.

"I am afraid," said she, "that in everything she is antagonistic to myself. Tell me where she lives, and all about her."

"She has lived principally at Ryversdale," he went on. "Ryversdale is the home of our race. My father died when I was quite young, and I was for many years what is called a minor; my mother was a kind of queen-regent. She lived at the castle—Ryversdale is a castle; and she managed everything, all the estates and their revenues. She has a wonderful talent for government and administration. She has an estate of her own, called Alton Hall, and during the last year she has lived almost entirely there. My mother is one of those who go to Court regularly. She would not miss a Drawing-room on any consideration, and she is, I believe, a great favorite with the Queen."

Again the delicate brows were daintily arched. Lord Ryvers did not pause to chide, but hastened on.

"There is not much more to tell you. My mother always looks like a picture just out of a frame. She has three weaknesses—rich black velvet, fine point lace, and rare diamonds."

"Tell me," said Violet, thoughtfully; "what would your mother say to or think of a woman like Mrs. Carstone?"

Lord Ryvers laughed.

"They could not live in the same hemisphere," he answered. "She would be an impossible woman to my mother."

"Would Lady Ryvers patronize her?" asked Violet.

"No, I think not. She would not tolerate her. My mother is the very ideal of well-bred, dainty refinement."

"I should like Mrs. Carstone best," said contradictory Violet.

"I care little whom you like, if you will only love me."

"And your mother, being what she is," said Violet, "no doubt wished you to marry some one like herself."

The simple-hearted young man fell into the neat little trap laid for him.

"My mother wished me to marry Gwendoline Marr," he said.

"That will make it doubly unpleasant for me," said

Violet, "if ever I should know her. Now I have a fair idea of your mother, tell me about your sisters."

"That will be easier," he said. "They are not at all complex characters. My elder sister, Lady Lester, is one of those calm, serene women, the contemplation of whom gives repose. She holds a very high position in English society. Now, Violet, darling, do not draw those pretty brows. Her husband, the Earl of Lester, has a beautiful place at Draynham, and they are, I suppose, very happy. Lady Lester has great influence over my mother. She is like her in feature; they are both handsome women. Lady Lester is very much admired, and is very popular. She always seems far above the world, above all common ways. Her eyes are grand, calm, and serene; her voice is low, and very sweet."

"Shall I be the proper kind of sister-in-law for one of so exalted nature?" she asked.

He detected the irony in her voice, and colored faintly. He knew that he had done wrong in speaking of his sister in flattering terms.

"Is she proud, this Lady Lester?" asked Violet, suddenly.

"No; she is too serene to be either proud or vain," said Lord Ryvers. "Monica is my younger sister. I do not know her so well; her character is hardly formed. My mother finds fault with her because she is neither an Alton or a Ryvers—that is, she does not resemble either side of the family. Another thing my mother complains of in her is her want of what she calls proper pride."

"I shall like her," said Violet. "I like your last sketch best of all. If it would be possible for me to make a friend in your family, I should say it would be with your sister Monica."

"She is bright and pretty with the prettiness of youth. She is nothing like Lady Lester or my mother."

"You have no brother?" said Violet.

"I wish I had an elder brother," he replied; "then I should be without any of those prefixes you dislike so much. You would not object so utterly to me if I were a poor younger son—would you, Violet?"

"I cannot tell," she answered; "it seems to me that would be bad enough."

Lord Ryvers looked at her.

"Now that you know more of those belonging to me, now that you stand more face to face with my life, Violet, will you say that you forgive me? I cannot say more than this, that from my very heart I am sorry, and that, if I knew what to say to appease you, I would say it, if I knew what to do, I would do it."

But Violet was looking from him over the sunlit waters, and the words of pardon were yet unspoken.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I CANNOT give you an answer at once," said Violet to her husband; "but I will think the matter over. One thing I will promise—I will not go away without telling you my decision."

And to Lord Ryvers that seemed something gained.

"Violet," he said, "I want you to listen to me just two minutes longer. I have that to say to you which will prove my sincerity. You do not like the kind of life that lies before you?"

"No; candidly speaking, I do not," she replied.

"You will not like to be called Lady Ryvers, nor to be mistress of Ryversdale, nor to be the wife of a rich man—you care for none of these things, do you?"

"No," she replied; "I do not."

"Then, Violet, to win your forgiveness and to make you happy," he said, "I will give up everything in the world for you. I will let lands, title, and money lie in abeyance. I will paint, and we will live on the money that painting brings. I will give up everything for you, and never remember that I am anything but an artist. The money and the lands, title, and everything else may go—go to the next of kin, a little fellow now at Eton; all that I want is you."

The romantic generosity of those words touched her. She looked at him with the first sign of softening that he had seen in her eyes.

"Do you mean that?" she asked. "Will you really give up everything for me?"

"I will," he said. "Oh, Violet, have you to learn now that you are the dearest thing in life to me?"

"You will give up everything—you will remain abroad, give up all, and work hard at your pictures?" she asked.

"I will do it unhesitatingly for you," he replied. "I would not make the sacrifice for any one else; but I will for you. I must say myself that I love my name, that I am proud of my race, that I have always been proud of my beautiful place Ryversdale; but nothing that I have or hold is to be compared with my love for you."

"And for me you are content to give up all that your soul holds most dear?"

"To keep you, most certainly," he answered. "I love you above and before everything in this wide world. Of what use would it be to me if I were king of the whole universe and had not you?"

"You have a great love for me," she said, thoughtfully.

"You ought to know it by this time," he replied, earnestly. "I can give you no greater proof of my love than this—that I am willing to die to everything else but you."

"It would be a noble sacrifice," she said, musingly. "It would prove a noble love. What if I take you at your word, Randolph?"

"I wish you to do so. My offer was not mere pretense, a few words uttered for the sake of eloquence or pleading; I mean honestly what I said. I will give up all I have in the world if you will forgive me and remain with me."

She felt that she could not be outdone in generosity, and this was generous beyond all words. She knew that he meant it. She began to realize what a grand love this was. If it had stooped to artifice once, it rose to grandeur now. He was perfectly sincere; but she could not exact such a promise from him, she could not permit such a sacrifice. He had touched her at last. He saw that her face had softened, her eyes had brightened.

"No," she said, slowly; "you shall not make so great a sacrifice for me. That you are ready to do it is enough; I want no more. You are willing to make a sacrifice for me; I will make one for you."

"My darling!" he cried, enraptured at the very idea.

"Do not be too sanguine," she said. "I am not at all sure that the arrangement will succeed. Indeed, if I know myself, it will not. I begin to see my way more clearly. You are willing to give up everything in the world for me; I will give up—not my prejudices, I could not part with them, but I will give up my indulgence in

them, for your sake. I will try to share your life. But," she added, *naively*, "I am quite sure I shall not like it."

"Will you give it a trial?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, I will," she answered him.

"A fair, honest trial, Violet, in which you will endure patiently all that you dislike most?"

"I will," she repeated.

"I thank you. Lady Ryvers," he said, "from this moment you shall be known by your right name. After all, it will be a relief; I hate concealment. I shall write to my mother this very day, and tell her that we shall be at Ryverswell—when shall we say?"

"When you like," she replied, with a little shrinking, which, in his eager delight, he did not notice.

"Shall you mind if we set out to-morrow?" he asked. "I shall not like staying here after this; it would be very uncomfortable meeting the people who are stopping here."

"I am ready to go at any moment you may wish," she replied—"to-day, to-morrow, when you will."

She felt conscious that, having an ordeal to face, the sooner she faced it the better.

"Then we will start for England to-morrow. We must delay a day or two in Paris to buy a few things for my mother and sisters."

"Randolph," she said, gravely, "I have told you all that has been said about us. No one can prevent the comments of people; but they can easily be corrected."

He interrupted her hastily.

"You are thinking of the Carstones," he said. "I will make that right. We shall see them on the terrace this evening. Now, Violet, tell me how I am to thank you?"

"You have nothing to thank me for yet," she said. "I have only promised to try."

"That means so much, coming from you," he whispered, lovingly. "Oh, Violet, I am so glad that you know the truth at last! My deception has lain long and heavily on my mind."

"Do not be too sanguine," she said. "I shall do my best: but I am afraid that the new life will not suit me, nor the people I shall meet. I am proud and sensitive; they will be proud and exclusive."

"I would love any one for your sake," he remarked.

"You must try to love my people because they are mine. Will you, darling?"

"I will try," she replied.

"And you quite forgive me?"

"Yes," she answered; "I forgive you, because you are so nobly generous; I cannot help it. But—well, I will say no more than this—I wish it had been otherwise."

He felt chilled. After all his lavish love and passionate earnestness, those seemed cool words. Her manner, too, was cold—not what he had hoped it would be after his full explanation. He said to himself, with a deep sigh, that he would give her time. Of course the disclosure had been a shock to her; but she would get over that, and all would be well. He had not been prepared to find her so cold, so proud or obstinate; he had always thought her so gentle on every point except one.

They talked for a long time. He told her all about Ryversdale, about its beautiful rooms, its splendid glades and magnificent grounds.

"You, who love beautiful scenery, must enjoy it," he said; "you cannot fail to be pleased with it."

But there was no answering enthusiasm on her face. Then he thought that perhaps the wisest thing would be to say nothing about his home or himself in any way; so he talked about other things. Yet, it was evident, from the observations she made, that her thoughts still dwelt on the discovery.

The same evening Lord Ryvers saw the Carstone family on the terrace, and knew that the time had arrived when he must disclose who he was.

"Violet," he said, "come with me. We will face the foe together."

"What foe?" she asked.

"The Carstones. Come with me, and let me introduce you by your proper name and title."

The beautiful face flushed proudly; but she controlled the impulse that prompted her to speak in hot resentment, and went with him.

Did ever man look more gallant and brave, more handsome and proud, more erect of mien, more dignified in bearing than this young lord, as he walked with his wife down the terrace?

There was embarrassment and confusion on the faces of

the Carstones as he came up to the little group. Never did "blood" and "race" show more than in that little scene.

Lord Ryvers bowed as he took his wife's hand in his own.

"I have brought an old friend," he said, "to introduce by a new name,—my wife," and he laid great stress on the word. "My wife tells me that you have discovered a secret that I very much wished to keep a short time longer. That being the case, allow me to reintroduce myself and Lady Ryvers."

Mrs. Carstone's face beamed with good nature and awe. It was all really true then, and this beautiful, simple girl was Lady Ryvers. Richard Carstone looked bewildered; he knew neither what to say nor what to think. The case was quite out of his experience. He did not know whether he ought to congratulate, praise, or blame; therefore, like a wise man, he remained perfectly silent; while Oscar frowned.

"You have been so very kind to Lady Ryvers," continued the young lord, addressing himself pointedly this time to Mrs. Carstone, "that I feel a few words of explanation are due to you. As to any insolent conjectures about my marriage, they are beneath my contempt, and I treat them so by passing them by. The dear and honored lady who gave me her love is my wife, as much as the laws of God and man could make her so. The explanation of my secret is very simple. I am sorry to say that Lady Ryvers had a strong prejudice against my class. It was not her fault, but the fault of a false training; and the prejudice was so strong, Mrs. Carstone, that, if she had known I moved in a high circle, she would not have married me. So I wooed her as a poor artist, and—Heaven bless her!—she loved me for myself, and married me. Do you not think I was a very fortunate man? We should have had a few more months in this charming solitude, but for the ball and the visit of my friend, Forest-Hay."

"I think you are a most fortunate man, my lord," said the kindly lady; but neither of the gentlemen spoke.

"Now that the discovery is made," continued Lord Ryvers, "I shall lose no time in taking my wife home to England. I kept my marriage a secret for a short time in deference to her prejudices; but, now that the secret is no longer my own, I shall take her to my mother at once."

"Quite right, my lord," said Mrs. Carstone.

She owned afterward that he looked so brave, so hand-

some, so loving, that she longed to clasp her arms round his neck and kiss him.

"I wish you much happiness, my lord," said Richard Carstone, quite unconscious that his words sounded somewhat satirically. He did not know what else to say.

"Thank you," said Lord Ryvers, holding out his hand.

The frown on Oscar's face deepened. Others might believe what they liked; he would believe what he chose.

"We leave here to-morrow," said Lord Ryvers. "Perhaps Lady Ryvers will like to spend an hour or two with you this evening."

He said that to show her utter fearlessness as to any remarks they might make. Mrs. Carstone eagerly caught Violet's hand.

"It will be a great pleasure to me," she said, earnestly.

And Lord Ryvers went away leaving them together.

On the morrow they started for home, staying two days in Paris, where, in his wife's name, Lord Ryvers bought presents innumerable for his mother and sisters; and then they started for Ryverswell.

It was the beginning of a new life, in which Violet, Lady Ryvers, mistress of many a broad acre and much wealth, was to find out how long, sharp, and painful were the thorns hidden by the orange-blossoms.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RYVERSDALE was the delight of artists. It was one of the most ancient of the many ancient houses to be found in England. It stood in the prettiest part of Kent, where from the summit of the well-wooded hills one caught a glimpse of the sea. It was an abbey once upon a time, said to have been founded in the earlier days of the Anglo-Saxons. There was little trace of the old abbey to be found now, and the gray friars who owned it had been hundreds of years at rest. But every now and then in the grounds one came across a ruined arch, the trace of a wall, covered with thick ivy, the remains of an ancient crypt, the delicate tracery of a cloister, the outline of a grand old church. There was one especially beautiful ruin that each inhabitant of Ryversdale had done his best to preserve; that was the broken arch of what had once been the great eastern window. It was shadowed now by many trees. Stately

oaks stood near, and fragrant limes touched it with their drooping boughs. It was so thickly covered with ivy that the old gray stone could not be seen.

The Ryverses were a grand, courageous race; but as time passed on the spirit of the times changed, and they changed with it. Then the family grew less, their power and influence decreased; they were less known, less famous, until in this the nineteenth century they were no longer conspicuous for anything except the antiquity of their race.

Yet it was something to be a Ryvers. When the late Lord Ryvers went wooing the stately heiress of the Altons, some said that with her beauty and her money she might do better. But she said "No;" there were men in England of higher position and greater wealth, but none of more ancient or noble lineage, and that was what she valued most.

Ryverswell had been named partly from the river that ran through it to the sea, and partly from the old well called St. Michael's Well, which at one time had been almost a shrine in its way. It was the most curious of all old wells, lying deep and dark in a huge cave, fed by a subterranean current of water that was always fresh and always clear. The Castle was worthy of the grounds. It had been used for almost every purpose. It had been fortified in time of war; it had been the dower-house of a queen; it had once been the refuge of a discrowned king; now it was the peaceful home of a peaceful race, and a very beautiful home too. No element of the quaint or picturesque was wanting; the battlemented towers and tall turrets, the rich carvings, the great oriel windows, the grand sweep of the arches, the beauty of the white terraces, all made up a picture that, once seen, was never forgotten. The interior was equally beautiful. The rooms were light, large, and lofty, superbly furnished with treasures of art collected by many generations. Ryversdale was one of those grand and luxurious homes not to be found out of England, and thoroughly appreciated by its owners.

One morning at the end of October the family were gathered together in the Castle. It was chilly, and Lady Ryvers had ordered fires in all the rooms. The great drawing-room, which had once been the stateroom of a queen, presented a picture of comfort and splendor not often seen. It had been Lady Ryvers' pleasure that this

spacious and magnificent apartment should be furnished in white and gold. There was no other color; nothing marred that magnificent harmony. The ceiling was superbly painted; the walls were paneled in white and gold; the pictures were the finest works of modern art; while statues stood on golden pedestals. The carpet was of white velvet pile, the furniture was covered in white velvet, and the hangings were of rich white velvet, embroidered with gold. The works of art were treasures brought from every land; but perhaps the most remarkable, certainly the most beautiful feature was the quantity of choice and fragrant hot-house flowers standing in the *jardinières*. The dowager Lady Ryvers was accustomed to say that the love and culture of flowers was a sure sign of a refined mind. It was characteristic of her that, wherever she went and wherever she lived, she was surrounded by flowers.

There was no smile on her ladyship's face this morning. The October sun shone on the white terraces, the light flashed on the river; there was a pleasant musical sound from a small fountain; the rich odor of white hyacinths filled the room, and the cheerful light of the fire added a rich glow of warmth; yet not one of these comforts, luxuries, or beauties brought a smile to her ladyship's face.

Her heart was troubled within her. Yesterday her fair haughty face had hardly a line upon it; to-day there were several. The greatest sorrow of her life had befallen her, and she knew not how to meet it. Yesterday she was the proudest mother in England, to-day the haughty head was bent low. Yesterday she spoke of her son with pride, to-day she would not whisper his name even to herself. Yesterday she had looked with serene eyes on the pictured faces that graced the old walls, the faces of the Ladies Ryvers long since dead; to-day the pictured eyes seemed to mock her. Yesterday she could have declared that in her whole life she had known no cloud; to-day it seemed to her as though the darkness of her grief and the shadow of shame would never pass away. Only this morning she had received a letter from the son she idolized, the son on whom all her hopes had been fixed, telling her that he was married, that he had been married a whole year, and that he was bringing his wife home to Ryversdale, where he begged his mother and sister to meet them. He added that his wife Violet was the daughter of a doctor, a simple, beauti-

ful girl, without fortune, but with the grace and loveliness of a queen.

Lady Ryvers was in London with her daughter Monica when she received the letter. She read it, and sat for some time in a stupor of pain and wonder. The marriage of her daughters had been a matter of great moment to her, the marriage of her son was of far greater importance. It was the pivot on which all her life was to turn. She could not believe or realize what she read. Randolph had always been the most obedient and devoted of sons to her. They had agreed on every subject except one—that was his devotion to art. The choice and the purchase of pictures was right enough; but, according to her ladyship's creed, the painting of them was quite another thing. She would far rather that her son had employed his time in any other fashion; still she was patient, because it was the only fault she had to find with him. And now he had taken the most important step in life without consulting her; he had married without even asking approval of his choice, and she felt justly aggrieved. When she had read the letter through again, she rang the bell.

"Tell Miss Ryvers that I wish to see her," she said to the servant who answered it.

A few minutes afterward Monica Ryvers entered the room where her mother awaited her.

"Monica," said Lady Ryvers, "read that. It has broken my heart."

Monica took the letter from her mother's hand. She read it carefully, and then looked with wondering eyes into her mother's face.

"Randolph married, mamma! What a strange thing that he never wrote to tell you of his intention! And he has married a stranger!"

"It has broken my heart," repeated Lady Ryvers. "To think that he should have chosen the daughter of a country doctor, and he might have married Gwendoline Marr! I shall never face the world again, Monica." If she had heard that her only son had committed a forgery or a murder, Lady Ryvers could not have been more affected. "A penniless, nameless stranger," she said—"and he my only son! He has spoiled my life; he has indeed, Monica."

"Mamma," said the girl, "I have never seen tears in

your eyes before; that distresses me more than Randolph's marriage."

"He was so gifted. He had a larger fortune and brighter prospects than any young man I know; handsome, gifted, heir to a grand old name and a grand old estate, yet he has spoiled his life by marrying a doctor's daughter. My dear Monica, words fail me."

"Dear mamma, she may not be so hopelessly bad if she is very beautiful."

"Hush!" said Lady Ryvers, with an imperious gesture. "I must bear my troubles as the Ryverses of old bore their reverses on the battle-field. The world is my battle-field. This is my first great defeat; I must bear it. But do not offer me any weak words of consolation; for a sorrow like mine there are none. My only son, my only son!"

"You should have received this letter two days since, mamma," said Monica. "It has been sent here from Mount Avon. To-day is All Hallows' Eve."

"Then we must go by the first train this morning. Send a telegram to Draynham, asking Marguerite to meet us. Do not tell her what is wrong; it might distress her."

Monica smiled at the thought. She had never seen that serenely calm sister of hers distressed in her life.

So it was arranged that Lady Ryvers and her daughter should travel to Ryverswell that same day.

"We shall be in plenty of time to meet them," said Lady Ryvers, with the calm of despair. "If they are coming from Paris, as I understand from Randolph's letter, they cannot reach Ryverswell to-night. I am not a woman given to emotion," she added; "but I cannot realize that I am going to see my son's wife."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN the drawing-room at Ryversdale Lady Ryvers sat, awaiting what in her heart she called her doom. Monica had done her best; but, finding that all attempts at consolation only made her mother more irritable, she left her alone. Lady Lester was expected, and the youngest daughter trusted much to the influence of the elder one, to her calm wisdom, her serene manner of dealing with all difficulties.

Hard thoughts must have been in Lady Ryvers' heart,

for they were written on her face when her two daughters entered the room.

The Countess of Lester had just reached Ryversdale, and was anxious to know what was the matter. She went up to her mother and embraced her.

"I am afraid you are in trouble, mamma," she said, calmly, so calmly that her words contrasted curiously enough with her face and manner. "You must be, or you would not have telegraphed for me. Arthur wanted very much to come with me; but it was impossible. I had to travel with Fisher. What is wrong, mamma? You are not ill yourself, I am glad to see."

"Did you think I was?" asked Lady Ryvers.

At times like these, when she felt irritable, the calm serenity of her fearless daughter tried her just a little. There was enough resemblance between Lady Ryvers and the Countess of Lester to show they were mother and daughter. They had the same dark imperial beauty, the same grand carriage, the same delicate brows and exquisite profile; but the character of Lady Ryvers' beauty was pride, that of Lady Lester's serenity. Lady Ryvers was a wonderfully preserved woman who looked ten years younger than she really was.

On this morning Lady Lester looked especially well. She wore a graceful dress of Indian silk and neat Parisian bonnet that rendered her if possible more charming.

She had been summoned to meet her mother; but she stood there, calm, unruffled, no wonder in her lovely dark eyes, few questions on her lips, ready to hear anything, and not to be surprised. If she lived to be seventy, there would be no wear and tear of emotion on her smooth face, no wear or tear of passion; the calm, unmoved loveliness would be the same when she lay in her coffin.

She had come to listen to her mother's troubles; but she was careful how the folds of her dress fell, as though she were posing for a statue. It was wonderful to see the face of Monica, who stood watching her with something between a sigh and a smile.

"Shall I ring? Will you go to your room first, Marguerite, or will you wait?"

"I will wait, mamma. I am anxious to know why you sent for me."

"To tell you, my dear, the worst news you ever heard in your life," cried Lady Ryvers—"the very worst!"

Not an eyelash on the beautiful face quivered, the dainty, delicate bloom underwent no change.

"Bad news, dear mamma? Is it anything about Arthur?"

"No; what could I know about Arthur! You have just left him strong and well, I suppose. It is much worse, much more important. Briefly, Marguerite, it is this. Your brother Randolph, my only son—Heaven help me!—has married without my knowledge; I will not speak of my consent."

"Randolph married!" cried Lady Lester—and for once the delicate brows were arched—"married without informing you, mamma? That is very wrong."

"I knew you would feel it, Marguerite, although you are not given to displays of emotion; I knew you must feel it. Monica persists in attempting to comfort me; you will not try. You know such a blow as this has—has shattered me!"

Then Monica came forward. If she loved any one on earth, it was her brother Randolph, with his beautiful face and poet's soul. She formed a complete contrast to her stately mother and sister. Monica Ryvers was not tall, she had a slight, girlish figure, about which there was nothing remarkable except its supple grace. She walked well, danced well, moved well. She had not the statuesque elegance that distinguished Marguerite, Countess of Lester. She would have flown through six rooms while the stately beauty crossed one. Her charm lay in her quick, light, active movements. She was the very child of impulse. She was not beautiful, in the common acceptation of the word, although she had Irish eyes, and hair that was black and waving. Hers was a face that, without being noticeably lovely, yet flashed intelligence, was full of sparkle and of fire, full of wit and humor, and capable of any amount of pathos. With smiles and tears always close together, she was a girl whom it was impossible for her lady mother to understand.

"Why do you laugh?" she would ask her at times; and again, "Why do you cry?" she would say, when the girl's face flushed with passion or paled with emotion.

Lady Ryvers would have found it easier to have read a Greek volume or translated Hebrew than to have under-

stood her charming, impulsive, gifted child. She came forward slowly now; that constant reference to her attempt at consolation troubled her.

"Mamma, dear, if I knew what better to say, I would say it," she said.

"It is better to be silent than to give utterance to foolish platitudes," returned Lady Ryvers. "How many times this day have you told me that what cannot be cured must be endured?"

"It is perfectly true, mamma," said the girl.

"So it may be; but that is no earthly reason why you need repeat it."

"Monica," said Lady Lester, "it would be better for you to be silent; you never did understand mamma."

"I only want to comfort her. I cannot bear to see her so unhappy."

"But I tell you there is no comfort!" cried Lady Ryvers. "Oh, Marguerite, my heart is broken!"

"Nay, mamma, let us hope it is not quite so bad as that," said Lady Lester.

But she asked no questions as to who her sister-in-law was, or anything about her.

"It is as bad as can be, Marguerite. He has married some poor obscure girl without birth, fortune, or anything else to recommend her."

"Except beauty," put in Monica.

"Yes," allowed Lady Ryvers, with some irritation, "except beauty. Now what is to be done? It is our social ruin. He is the head of the House of Ryvers. What is to be done, Marguerite?"

When that most serene of women did utter an opinion, it was very often what her sister, with some justice, called a "crusher." This was the sort of opinion, she uttered now.

"It is a mischievous affair," she said, "and I cannot see how it is to be mitigated. I always thought," she added, slowly, "that Randolph meant to marry Gwendoline Marr."

"He ought to have married her," replied Lady Ryvers. "Marguerite, I shall never face the world. I shall leave England, and never return."

The Countess of Lester sat for some time in silence, and, curiously enough, this silence was more consoling to her mother than all Monica's well-meant efforts.

"Mamma," said Monica, as though she had just made a sudden discovery, "you may rely upon it, Randolph has married for love."

"Then he ought to be doubly ashamed!" cried Lady Ryvers. "The head of a house like ours, and to take such nonsense into consideration! He has acted, no doubt, like some untaught and untrained schoolboy; he has been charmed with some rustic blooming face, and has married the girl without any consideration as to how we should like it, or any thought of his own position. Oh, Marguerite, what shall we do? It is the first low marriage in the family."

"You cannot call it a low marriage, mamma," put in Monica. "'Low' means something disreputable, does it not? Randolph said she was a doctor's daughter. She must be educated and refined."

"A country doctor!" groaned Lady Ryvers. "And the professions in these days are thrown open to every one. Oh, Marguerite, what shall we do?"

"I cannot see that there is anything to be done, mamma, the affair is hopeless," said Lady Lester. "In this case a young man married is indeed a young man marred. Randolph has ruined his career."

"Another crusher," thought Monica, who would fain have uttered a word in praise of her brother.

"Beauty," she said, "as you know mamma, goes for something in these days. I read yesterday that one of the peculiarities of the nineteenth century was the power and influence of beauty. If Randolph's wife be, as he says, so lovely, surely that will atone in some degree for other deficiencies—will it not?"

"Beautiful women are not so rare in our family," answered Lady Ryvers, musingly.

"Randolph has plenty of taste," said the Countess of Lester. "I do not think any rustic beauty would charm him."

"He has married for love," remarked Lady Ryvers, piteously; "and love is proverbially blind."

"Randolph was never blind," said Monica. "Mamma, do not be so unhappy. Wait until you see her."

On some pretext Lady Ryvers sent Monica from the room.

"Marguerite," she cried, hastily, "I want just one word

with you before she returns. I have been wondering if this marriage be legal."

"Legal, mamma! I should say so. Randolph may have been very imprudent, but he would take good care of that."

"I am not so sure," said Lady Ryvers, thoughtfully. "There are many formalities, many things needed to make a marriage legal—I do not know what they all are—such as residence in parishes, consent of parents, guardians, and many other things."

"But, mamma," cried Lady Lester, "you would not surely part them if there should be any flaw?"

"Most certainly. I would part them to-day if I could find the least flaw in a marriage which is perfectly distasteful to me."

"That would be wicked, mamma," said the young Countess.

"Not at all, my dear. I consider the marriage wicked. I would undo it if I could. It is monstrous and unnatural—the head of a house like ours to marry in this underhand fashion of a girl of that kind and that class! It is enough to make his father rise from the grave."

"My dear mamma, what a dreadful idea!" said Lady Lester.

"I sent for you, Marguerite," continued Lady Ryvers, "because I know that, although you are so quiet, and understand the world. I want to consult you. Do you not think we had better keep this unfortunate matter quite quiet, for a few weeks at least, until we see what she is like, and whether there is any chance of undoing the mischief done?"

"I should think it would be as well not to make it public for some time at least. But, mamma, I will have nothing to do with the undoing of the marriage. I do not believe in it. I cannot think that the want of some little legal form can render invalid a religious ceremony."

"If you take high grounds, certainly not," said Lady Ryvers.

"There are no other grounds to take," returned the Countess, serenely. "But I should certainly advise you to keep the whole story quiet so long as Randolph will allow you; and in the meantime, if she spends some few weeks here with you and Monica, you will see what she is like, and whether it will be possible to do anything with her."

"I wish, Marguerite, you would stay ; you would be so much more useful than Monica. Arthur would come if you ask him."

"I am sure he would, and I should like it, mamma. I know that I could be of use to you."

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER XXX.

IT was seven o'clock—dinner had been ordered for eight—and there was a subdued air of excitement in the Ryversdale household. It had been found needful to tell the servants that the young lord was bringing home a wife. Lady Ryvers would fain have kept it from them if she could. Her one idea was to keep it secret from all the world. In spite of all that conscience said about the matter, she was quite resolved that, if it were possible to find a flaw in the marriage, it should be annulled.

How keenly she suffered, no one could guess. She had been so proud of her son ; she had been so contemptuously pitiful to other mothers whose children had made wretched marriages. In a perfectly refined and well-bred manner she had boasted of her son, and she had been much courted for his sake. There was no doubt that Randolph, Lord Ryvers, was one of the best matches in England. His mother knew it. On the strength of it she had patronized duchesses with large families of daughters. True, she was a very popular member of society on her own account, but she was doubly so on account of her son. Princess Saxon, who had four plain daughters all unmarried, never ceased to court her. The Duchess of Inverary, one of the most exclusive queens of society eagerly sought Lady Ryvers, and said openly how much she should like an alliance between the two houses ; and Gwendoline Marr, the most beautiful and wealthy heiress of the day, had more than once shown her preference for him.

Not only were all these triumphs ended, but a series of terrible mortifications had begun. How should she face the world when the pride of her life was gone ? How could she bear the sneers of those ladies at whom she had sneered, and who would not in their turn spare her ? She knew exactly the tone of affected commiseration in which

they would address her. She knew how they would sting her under the guise of pitying words.

"He might have married any one," she cried; "and he has brought me to this, that I shall be ashamed to show my face where, until now, I have been an honored guest! I can just imagine Princess Saxon, with that sweet, languid smile of hers, saying, 'What is this story about your son's marriage, dear Lady Ryvers? I have not believed one word of it; and I shall have to own that it is all true.'

For the time the proud lady almost hated her son; and she hated with double bitterness the girl he had married.

Seven o'clock had struck, and every minute she expected the carriage. It had been sent to Ryverswell railway station, and the three ladies awaited its return. Lady Ryvers would not have owned such a thing for the world—she would have called it theatrical and ill-bred—but she had chosen the great drawing-room in which to receive Randolph's wife, hoping the sight of its grandeur would annihilate her. For the same reason she had chosen her richest dress of black velvet, her finest point-lace, and some of her most superb diamonds. She looked majestic and magnificent, yet in her heart she half despised herself. What did it matter, after all, whether a creature so utterly insignificant were crushed or not? Lady Lester looked beautiful as a dream. She wore a dress of pale amber brocade, with some fine rubies. Monica wore white with blue hyacinths.

"I don't know how I shall meet them," said Lady Ryvers. "I have never felt that it was impossible to be civil before. Marguerite, what shall I do? My sense and tact fail me."

With half closed eyes Marguerite, Countess of Lester, lay back in her chair. She held a richly jeweled fan in her hands; and the family crisis, as Monica irreverently called it, had not troubled her. When Lady Ryvers spoke, the elder daughter opened her magnificent dark eyes.

"Do not trouble, mamma," she said. "Let me use one of Monica's platitudes—what is to be will be. You have anticipated the worst. It is just possible that we may have an agreeable surprise."

"My dear Marguerite," cried Lady Ryvers, "I must kiss her. If I do not, Randolph will be mortally of-

fended. Yet how can I? I wish they were here, and it was all over."

"Mamma, shall you go into the hall to meet them?" Monica asked, a short time afterward, when the sound of carriage-wheels was heard.

"Certainly not," replied her ladyship. "Why should I? That is Randolph's voice. Oh, Marguerite, how my heart beats! It has not beaten so quickly for years."

In the agitation of the moment the three ladies drew together. They formed a striking group. The door was opened—they never knew how or by whom—and Randolph entered the room. They saw the tall figure and the bronzed, handsome face; they saw that he led by the hand a graceful girl, whose face was hidden by a traveling-veil. It seemed for a moment as though they were all paralyzed; then the rich, cheery voice broke the spell.

"Mother, Marguerite, Monica—all here! How good of you!"

The next minute the graceful figure of the girl was seen standing alone, and Randolph had flung his arms vehemently round his mother.

"O, mother," he said, as he kissed the haughty, handsome face, "it is good to see you again! Marguerite, I am delighted!"—and he kissed the Countess of Lester—"Monica, my darling!"—and that was the warmest greeting of all.

Then, with a look of pride on his face and a bow such a courtier would have made before a queen, Lord Ryvers stepped back. He took the hand of his wife and led her to Lady Ryvers.

"Mother," he said, "this is my wife, Violet; Violet—my mother, Lady Ryvers."

She lacked all her accustomed grace and dignity when she said:

"I bid you welcome home." It was a great effort to say it. The voice was cold and hard; there was no smile on the face, no light in the eyes; but she held out her jeweled hand in greeting. "Welcome home," she repeated; but her voice was frigid.

"Mother," said Randolph, "she is my wife and your daughter. Have you no warmer greeting for her than this?"

The lips with which she touched, not the girl's face, but

the veil that covered it, were white as the lips of death; but Randolph seemed content. Then he led his wife to the Countess of Lester.

"Marguerite," he said, "I bring you another sister."

The beautiful Countess, with the most serene expression possible on her face, and with a most innocent expression in her eyes, made a courtesy that would have done honor to a princess. She did not commit herself either by a frozen kiss or a touch of the hand; she murmured a few words that were quite inaudible. Violet never knew whether they were of praise, blame, welcome, or rejection; but she felt that her welcome was of the stateliest possible kind.

"Monica, my darling sister," said Lord Ryvers—"my wife."

No words could describe the proud exultation of his voice, the ring of tenderness and passion; and Monica, for her brother's sake—she thought only of him—flung her arms round the young girl's neck and kissed her warmly.

Then there was a pause. Lady Ryvers and Lady Lester made a mental comment on the young wife's dress. "Worth," said the Countess to herself, "and Worth at his best." The traveling-dress was so big, so elegant in its simplicity—dark-gray velvet trimmed with a slight edging of fur—and it fitted the girl's figure perfectly, showed the beautiful lines, the graceful curves, the fine contour. It was the dress of a lady; they felt it instinctively.

Violet did not raise her veil; she stood perfectly still, but, when her husband turned to her, and said, "Darling, you are welcome home at last!" a quiver ran through her.

She thanked him in her heart; but she spoke no word.

"You are tired, probably," said Lady Ryvers; and, try as she would, she could not take the pride and *hauteur* from her voice.

"I am very tired," said Violet; "we had a rough passage."

How eagerly they listened for her reply! The voice was sweet and musical, the accent refined, the intonation perfect.

"You will like to go to your rooms," said Lady Ryvers. "Have you brought a maid with you?"

"No," replied Violet.

"I thought you would be kind enough, mother, to recommend one," her husband interposed. "Violet has not had much experience in that way."

"I have never had a maid," said Violet, "and should hardly know how to engage one."

"Never had a maid!" repeated Lady Ryvers; and her accent was one of undisguised horror.

The Countess of Lester smiled the smile of one who was learning strange things.

"My maid Fisher would not perhaps mind," said Lady Ryvers, doubtfully. "She is clever; but one hesitates in these days to ask favors from servants."

"I should not ask favors; I should issue commands," put in Randolph, at which a faint gleam of approval was visible in the eyes of the Countess.

"Mamma," said Monica, timidly, "if you will permit me, I will take"—then she paused for a moment, as though at a loss for a word—"I will take Lady Ryvers to her rooms."

She saw by the sudden flush that covered her mother's face, the sudden, angry light that flashed in her eyes, that she had done wrong. It was almost more than proud Lady Ryvers could brook to hear the name she had borne so long given to another.

"If you wish, you can show your brother's wife to her rooms, Monica," she said, stiffly.

"Which rooms have you given to us mother?" Lord Ryvers asked, anxious to make a diversion.

"The white suite in the western wing, just for the present; you can make your own choice afterward," she replied.

Lord Ryvers did not know whether to feel pleased or angry. The white suite, as the beautiful set of apartments was called, was generally set apart for visitors; but there were handsomer suites in the house.

"Thank you," he said, simply. "I am sure we shall find them comfortable."

For the whole world his mother could not have refrained from a slight toss of her head. If those rooms were not good enough for this young person from the country, she would like to know what were.

Monica saw the danger-signals, and hastened from the room, taking Violet with her.

Then on the three left behind there fell a strange, uncomfortable silence: Lord Ryvers was the first to break it.

"You were surprised to hear of my marriage, mother," he said.

"I was something more than surprised, she replied.

"We had better not discuss it yet, Randolph; I have not recovered from the shock."

"I ought to have written. I own frankly, mother, that I ought to have consulted you; but love must be my excuse. You will try to love Violet for my sake?"

"I can make no promise, Randolph. I would rather not discuss the matter yet. It has been a terrible blow to me. I must recover from it."

"Marguerite," said the young man, his voice full of passion and tenderness, "you will be kind to my wife?"

The Countess looked at him.

"I think mamma is right," she said, gently; "we must have time. You see, Randolph, this young lady has belonged to quite a different class from ours, and it will be some time before she will understand us or we shall understand her. You have made an experiment; you must patiently await the result."

"Violet is a lady," he said, quickly.

His mother held up her hands.

"Do not discuss the question," she cried; "I cannot endure it."

"At what time do we dine?" asked Lord Ryvers.

"Eight o'clock. The first bell will ring in a few minutes; you will be late, Randolph," replied his mother.

And that was her welcome home.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE two ladies left alone, the dowager sunk down in an attitude of despair.

"He is just as infatuated as ever, Marguerite," she said. "What shall I do?"

"What do you think of her?" asked the Countess of Lester, with some little interest.

"I did not see her face," replied Lady Ryvers. "She did not raise her veil."

"I was favorably impressed," said Lady Lester. She has certainly a perfect figure, and she dresses with perfect taste. I liked her voice and her accent. I noticed another thing that pleased me: she evinced no curiosity. I do not think that she saw even the beauty of the room. A vulgar girl would have shown some surprise, if merely to gratify you."

"You are very kind, Marguerite. Certainly, there is

some comfort in what you say. But, my dear, I trust Monica will not be familiar with her; if she is, she will undo all the good that we can do."

"Monica is very impulsive," said the Countess. "No one can ever foresee what she will do or say."

"She is neither an Alton nor a Ryvers," complained Lady Ryvers. "I feel, Marguerite, as though I should never get over this trouble. How little I thought that the coming home of my son's wife would be like this. I had a dream of some great pageant, of a wedding exceeding all others in magnificence, of a coming home that would be remembered in the county for many years, of a daughter-in-law after my own heart. Do you know, Marguerite, one of my happiest anticipations has always been the thought of presenting Randolph's wife to the Queen?"

"It may be realized, mamma," said the Countess. "From the roughest marble a skillful sculptor shapes the most beautiful statues. You cannot tell what change a few months of your training will make."

"My dear," returned Lady Ryvers, with some irritation, "I shall not have patience. I shall never be able to control my dislike to the girl. To think of the difference between what might have been and what is?"

In the meantime the two young girls had made their way to the white suite of rooms. If Violet felt startled at the magnificence of the house, at the beauty of the paintings and statues, she said nothing, and Monica admired her reticence. The real thing that oppressed her and lay heavily on her mind was that one day this must all be hers. Monica Ryvers little dreamed what was passing in the mind of her companion. Her eyes fell on the crest, on the coat of arms, on the hundred and one insignia of that patent of nobility which she so completely and thoroughly despised. Monica felt almost shy with this tall, stately girl who was so silent.

"Mamma selected these rooms, because there is such a beautiful view from the windows," said Monica. "You will choose your own now."

Violet bowed. There was no pleasure, no elation, in her manner; and Monica wondered more and more what manner of girl was this who saw so much beauty and so much magnificence, yet was quite unmoved by it. She opened the door of a room, the luxurious appointments of which

might have extorted a cry of admiration from a Stoic. A fire burned cheerfully in a bright grate, the soft light of innumerable wax-tapers filled the room. No word came from Violet. She had made up her mind as to one thing before she entered the house—nothing should draw from her one word of admiration; her husband's relatives should not think her overwhelmed with their grandeur.

"I will adopt the *nil admirari* system," she said to herself. "They will fancy that I shall be overwhelmed by their grandeur and magnificence. I would rather have my old home at St. Byno's."

"I hope," said Monica, "you will find everything comfortable and as you like it."

Violet glanced round carelessly.

"If I require anything more, I will ask for it," she said. A gleam of appreciation came into Monica's eyes.

"That little speech was worthy of the Countess of Lester!" she said to herself. "We shall have a lively time of it at Ryversdale!"

Then Violet went to her and laid one hand on her arm.

"I thank you," she said, "for the kindly greeting you gave me—I shall never forget it—also for the kiss. Your kindness touched my heart." She was about to add, "I thought nothing would ever touch it again;" but she restrained. Better to keep her own secrets locked in her heart.

Then Monica, with kindly hands, unfastened the thick veil and the pretty traveling-bonnet. She was fairly startled at the marvelous beauty of the face beneath; yet, beautiful as it was, there was something of sadness in the violet eyes and in the sweet, proud lips. It was not the face of a brilliantly happy young bride or of a well-contented young wife.

"What a beautiful sister you are!" cried Monica, enthusiastically. "Randolph told us you were beautiful; but I did not think you would be like this."

"I am glad you are pleased with me," said Violet, quietly. There was no resisting the honest, tender sympathy in the bright young face.

Then Monica wondered even more for, in removing the bonnet, all the thick mass of luxuriant golden hair fell over Violet's shoulders. A cry of admiration came from her lips.

"What magnificent hair!" she cried. "Why, this is the very color of colors! Some of the fashionable ladies in

London would give half their fortune for it. How long, how thick, how splendid it is! How well you dress it!"

"I spend very little time over it," said Violet, to whom hairdressing was a mystery.

"You must let mamma's maid come and help you," said Monica. "She is an adept at hairdressing. She can make the poorest head of hair look magnificent. You can guess what she will do with yours. I shall go and coax her to come."

"Pray do not," requested Violet, hastily. "I can do as I always do."

But Monica left the room before she had time to say more.

Presently Lord Ryvers opened the door; he stood for a moment in dazed admiration before the beautiful figure half covered with the veil of glittering golden hair.

"Violet," he said, in a low tone of voice, "amongst your various dresses, have you a nice dinner-dress?"

"I should suppose so," she answered, carelessly.

"My darling," he said, earnestly, "do try to look your best! You are always beautiful and bewitching. I want you to look more so than ever to-night. So much depends on first impressions."

He saw a faint gleam of contempt on the exquisite face. He kissed it, for he was gentleness and patience itself.

"You promised, Violet," he said.

She relented and looked at him with a smile. It was almost impossible to withstand his patient good humor and sweet temper. Violet always admired it. Once indeed she had said, "Randolph, you have the best and sweetest temper of any man I know; but you are a sleeping lion, I believe. If you were ever roused to anger, you would be much more angry than a worse-tempered man."

"Why do you think so?" he asked gravely.

"I imagine it from a look that I have seen once or twice in your eyes," she replied.

She thought of those words now, as he stood so patiently and gently kissing away the frown from her fair face. There came to her a wonder as to whether she really appreciated this great love of his, whether he would ever tire of her; and, while these thoughts were passing through her mind, his honest, frank eyes were looking smilingly down into hers.

"I will do my best, Randolph, I have a pretty dinner-dress which I think will suit the occasion. It is composed of white silk and white lace, and it is trimmed with rich purple heart's ease. I am quite—"

She paused, hearing something or some one at the door. Husband and wife stood together, and both turned to see what it was.

Fisher, her ladyship's maid, the disagreeable and spiteful but clever lady's-maid, stood there. Lord Ryvers felt vexed that she should have seen him kiss his wife, and he spoke sharply.

"Do you want anything, Fisher?" he asked.

"No, your lordship; but I understood this lady needed my assistance."

"I shall be glad," said the young husband, with some dignity, "if you will help my wife, Lady Ryvers, until her own maid arrives."

"The most beautiful creature I have ever seen in my life!" was the woman's mental comment. "She is fairer than the Countess."

"I will do what I can for her ladyship," she said, advancing into the room.

Violet would have given much to have beaten a retreat. She was far more alarmed at the lady's-maid than she had been at her mistress.

Lord Ryvers said a few hasty words of farewell.

"You will tell me how you like them all afterward," he said, in a low voice. "I must go down now."

"Oh, Randolph, take that horrible-looking woman away with you!" whispered Violet. "She is worse than any of them."

"She is a necessity, my dear," he answered.

With an anxious eye Lady Ryvers watched her husband's retreating figure.

"What can I do for you, my lady?" Fisher asked, approaching and courtesying, but there was a tinge of insolence in her manner.

"I do not know," said Violet. "I have never had a maid of my own. Do for me what every other lady's-maid does for her mistress."

There was no resisting this; the simple, quiet dignity of the answer awed the maid.

"Shall I brush your hair first, my lady?" she asked, more respectfully.

"If you please," said Violet.

And in a few minutes more the maid held the golden waves of hair in her hands, admiring the length and sheen.

"I have not seen such hair as this, my lady," she said, "since the time I left the Duchess of Hetherly. She had just the same, but her face did not correspond with it. It was all freckled and brown, the queerest complexion any lady ever had."

Violet made no remark. She was determined not to encourage gossip, yet just at present she could not summon courage to bid the woman to be silent.

"It took me nearly an hour every day to paint the Duchess' face. She was kind enough to say that I had an artistic touch. She was very difficult to please; she liked her face to vary every day."

Fisher frowned when she saw how coldly her gossip was received.

"I was sorry to leave the Duchess," she continued; "but she was very cross and 'upnish' with me one morning when I was painting her face. She said something to me, and I told her if she repeated it, I would leave at a moment's notice. She did repeat it, and I left her immediately, with half her face painted. She could not find any one to paint the other half; no one could match it. She sent to offer me anything in the world if I would go back to finish it."

"I think that was a very ill-natured trick," said Violet. And from that moment Fisher was the most bitter enemy Violet had in the house. Yet the woman was an artist in her way, and she could not resist the temptation of performing her task to the best of her ability.

Then Lord Ryvers came for his wife.

"Have I pleased you?" she asked, her beautiful eyes all alight.

"You have indeed!" he said. "I am proud of you, my lovely wife!"

He took her hand, and led her to the drawing-room. In one sense he was leading her to the great social battlefield, for here her new life began, and the first wound from the thorns in her orange-blossoms was to be given to her that night.—a wound that would never quite heal.

CHAPTER XXXII.

If Violet had spoken the truth that evening, when she sat down to dinner, she would have owned that the beauty and magnificence which surrounded her were most delightful. The dining-room was a large, lofty apartment containing some superb pictures. The table was a picture in itself, with its collection of plate, glass, glossy linen, beautiful flowers, rare fruits, and costly wines. To her uninitiated eyes, the ceremony at the table seemed very elaborate, but no word, no sign escaped her; and the dowager Lady Ryvers, watching her keenly, decided that she must be accustomed to good society, as she evinced no surprise. With some suspense the two ladies had awaited her return to the drawing-room.

"No one can tell what she is like with that veil over her face," the elder woman had declared.

Mother and daughter were standing together when husband and wife returned. They saw a girlish, graceful figure draped in glistening folds; they saw white, rounded arms, bare to the shoulder, dimpled and warm, clasped with costly bracelets of purple amethyst and gold; a beautiful white neck, gracefully arched; a peerless face, and a queenly head with a crown of golden hair. Purple heart's-ease lay in the fair hair and touched the white neck. It was the fairest picture of youth and beauty under the sun.

A thrill of admiration went through the hearts of both women when they saw her—an almost imperceptible smile passed over the face of the Countess of Lester.

"I do not think my mother need fear," she thought to herself.

Perhaps the dowager Lady Ryvers did experience some little sense of relief when she saw how beautiful and graceful the girl was. But that was soon dissipated, and she was more annoyed than ever by the expression of intense love and fervent admiration she saw on her son's face.

There was little chance of finding a flaw in a marriage where the husband was so devoted! There was no flaw either in the manner or behavior of the young girl who sat so perfectly self-possessed, evidently expecting to be *fêted*, and to receive all the attention due to a bride.

The dowager had had some vague idea that she could

make her feel how unwelcome her presence was by ignoring her in the calm cruel fashion adopted by fashionable women ; but there was no chance of it. No one could ignore the beautiful, queenly presence ; and, as the dinner progressed, a conviction came to the elder woman that this was a far more difficult case than she had thought.

There were character and determination in the beautiful face ; there were pride and dignity, although of a kind differing from her own ; there was principle ; there was plenty of individuality. It dawned across her ladyship's mind that this was no country girl to be crushed and quietly disposed of, but a rival who might possibly prove more powerful than herself.

If Violet had been of her own class, her mother-in-law would have rejoiced in these characteristics. She would have said, "Here is one to do honor to the grand old race." Identified with one whom, in her own mind, she called "a daughter of the people," they were distasteful to her. What right had the daughter of a country doctor to have such grace and dignity and beauty ? What right had she to have such a clear musical voice and refined accent ? The more beautiful, the more attractive the girl, the less chance there was of getting rid of her, of hiding her from the world. Before dinner was over, the dowager Lady Ryvers saw plainly enough that she had a rival to fear.

"I am glad, mother," said Lord Ryvers, while dinner was progressing, "that you did not ask any one to meet us. I was half afraid you would think it needful to have a dinner party."

"It was hardly probable," replied the dowager. "I never move in the dark."

Violet looked up with a sudden smile and a keen appreciation of the little allegory.

"Why did you smile?" asked the elder woman.

"Because I understand perfectly well what you mean," answered Violet. "You did not invite any one to meet us because you were not sure whether I should be presentable or not."

It was so exactly the truth, it was so exactly the thought which had passed through her mind and which she had uttered to Lady Lester, that there was perfect consternation for some few moments. A cannon-ball falling in their midst could not have startled them more. It was the

throwing down of a gauntlet, which no one at first picked up. Lord Ryvers hardly knew whether to admire his wife's spirit or to regret that she had so spoken. The dowager recovered herself, feeling that it was a kind of crisis, and that, if she allowed it to pass by, she would in some measure have lost ground.

"You are quite right," she said; "you are quick to understand. I certainly did think it would be better to wait a short time before sending out any invitations. I think so still."

"Did you like Paris?" asked Lady Lester, anxious to avert a collision.

"Very much; there is plenty of life there," replied Violet. "Randolph likes solitude; I like cities. I like the great tide of human life flowing to and fro."

"You have an active, energetic nature, perhaps," said Lady Lester.

"I am afraid I have a great deal of energy," said Violet.

And the Countess of Lester sighed, as though that were a thing deeply to be deplored.

"You will want it all," said Monica, suddenly.

And, if an oracle had spoken, they could not have been more surprised. She flushed crimson when she realized what she had said; but the Countess, with unusual good nature, came to the rescue.

"You will indeed," she agreed; "and, if Randolph does as we have always wished, and turns his attention to politics instead of painting, you will not have energy enough."

"In what way would that affect me?" asked Violet.

"The wife of a great politician or a great statesman has many cares," said the dowager. "It is not probable that you would understand."

"I do not see why I should not understand," rejoined Violet. "Every wife is supposed to be more or less engrossed in the pursuits of her husband."

"I thought, having lived all your life in the country, you would hardly enter into these matters," explained the dowager.

"Living in the country," said Violet, with a smile that was both bitter and sweet, "does not place a limit to any one's intelligence, I hope."

"I do not know," returned Lady Ryvers, slowly. "I have always understood that it did."

"There is not, of course, so much to see and hear," put in Lady Lester.

"I like great cities and the rush of life," said Violet; "but I think the finest, noblest, and most poetical natures love the country best. Randolph does, and he is as much poet as painter."

The dowager rose quickly. It was intolerable to her that this girl should argue and hold her own with such self-possession. Monica saw that her mother was ruffled and irritated.

"You will not be long, Randolph?" said her ladyship, as she passed by her son. "As he has chosen to marry a girl of that kind, he may entertain her; I shall not," she said to herself.

Monica had her own method of managing her mother. The Countess of Lester never attempted it; she allowed everything to take its own course. Monica placed her mother's easy-chair for her. She knew exactly how she liked her reading-lamp shaded; she knew the exact page at which to open the periodical she had been reading. It was Lady Ryvers' whim always to read at the little reading-table set aside for her. Her favorite periodical was *Temple Bar*; and it was well understood by her daughters that the mistress of Ryversdale chose those few minutes after dinner for sleep. But there was no drooping of the proud white eyelids this time.

The dowager looked particularly wide awake. Lady Lester settled herself cozily in one of the most luxurious of chairs and closed her eyes. She did not intend to take any part in what Monica called the "family battues." Violet looked around the large, magnificent room. She wished that Randolph would come. She hoped he would remember how lonely she must feel.

Lonely, but perfectly self-possessed. She was not in the least nervous with the three ladies. Mentally she thanked Heaven that she should not be compelled to live always with them. If she could endure her new life—and she was not sure of it—her time would not be spent with them. Seeing Lady Lester's eyes closed and Monica busy, she went over to one of the side tables where some photographs had been placed. She took up one. It was of Randolph, taken when he was a boy. Monica passed as she was looking at it.

"That is a good photograph," she said. "It is the one mamma likes best of Randolph."

Hearing the remark the dowager went up to them. Violet held up the little picture to her, and, as she did so, she saw a spasm of pain pass over the proud face.

"Yes," said her ladyship, "that was Randolph as a boy. A fine open face. I was proud of him then."

"Are you not proud of him now?" asked Violet.

The elder woman shook her head.

"No; I am most bitterly disappointed in him," she replied. "His infatuation for painting has always been a keen source of trouble to me; and now you must forgive me if I say that my disappointment is complete over his marriage."

"I am sorry," said Violet, stiffly.

"Sorrow will not mend it, I fear," remarked her mother-in-law. "He is the head of a noble family and of a grand old race. I have nothing to say against you personally; but my son's marriage is to me the keenest disappointment in the world."

Then Violet's face flushed hotly, and a light that was not pleasant to see flashed in her eyes.

"It may be so," she replied; "but I question the good taste of saying so to me."

"There I differ from you altogether," said the dowager. "I feel bound to express my disapprobation to you. I think you did wrong to marry my son."

"I think," rejoined Violet, trying to speak calmly, "that your son did a far worse wrong in marrying me. Perhaps the circumstances of that marriage are not known to you?"

"They certainly are not," said the elder woman; "nor do I wish to know them."

"Then would it not be better for your ladyship to suspend your judgment until you do know them? You have spoken your mind; allow me to speak mine. Had I known that your son was Lord Ryvers, I would rather have died than have married him!"

The dowager Lady Ryvers looked at her with wondering eyes.

"Am I to understand," she asked, "that you did not know who my son was—that you did not know that he was heir of Ryversdale?"

"Ryversdale!" repeated Violet, with scorn and contempt that almost annihilated her listener. "I did not know there was such a place: and I have been brought up to respect a man who makes a name for himself, rather than a man content to bear the name made for him!"

"Why, you must be a—a Chartist or a Radical! What could Randolph have been thinking of?" cried the dowager, raising her hands in horror.

"If your ladyship wishes for any more information with regard to the marriage," said Violet, proudly, "I prefer you to your son."

She walked away and entered the conservatory with all the dignity and majesty of an insulted queen, leaving the elder woman petrified with astonishment. Never had any person so addressed her in the whole course of her life. She remained standing for some minutes with the photograph in her hand; then, recollecting herself, she crossed the room to Lady Lester.

"My dear Marguerite," she said, "do open your eyes. I think I shall go mad; the affair is ten thousand times worse than I feared!"

"Is it? Why, mamma? I was hoping you would find it better."

"My dear, the girl is perfectly horrible. I shall decline to remain here with her. Randolph must have lost his senses. She is a Chartist, or something of that kind!"

"That will not matter, mamma. No one will trouble about her opinions while she has that beautiful face."

"She was positively rude to me, Marguerite—rude—and to me! No one has ever spoken to me in such a fashion; and she says,—listen, my dear!—she says that, if she had known Randolph was Lord Ryvers, she would not have married him. Do you believe it?"

"She looks truthful," said the Countess of Lester; "and Randolph has always had strange notions. It may be true; but mamma, I would not, if I were you, come to open warfare with her. It will not be wise."

"She will not be easily crushed," replied Lady Ryvers,—"I can see that."

Not one word more was exchanged that evening between Lord Ryvers' mother and his wife. Violet's heart was heavy with indignation, hot with anger. She said to her-

self, over and over again, that she could not bear it,—that she would not bear it.

She said nothing that evening to her husband. He looked so bright and happy, she would not trouble him; but in her heart she hated it all,—the luxury, the magnificence, the grandeur, the ceremony,—hated it all, and longed even for her old home at St. Byno's.

There was no one to whisper a warning that, unless she was careful, in learning to hate her husband's surroundings she might learn to dislike him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"MOTHER," said Lord Ryvers, "do you like my wife? I should be pleased to know what you think of her. She is very beautiful and graceful. All her perfections will be doubly dear to me if you admire them."

It was the morning after their arrival. The dowager Lady Ryvers had excused herself from attending the breakfast-table under the plea of a headache; but her son, hearing that she was now writing letters in her boudoir, had gone to see her. He was anxiously awaiting his mother's verdict.

He had been delighted with Monica, who gave her unqualified approval, and who, with a rapturous flash from her eyes, and a warm kiss, had cried out:

"I love her, Randolph; she is so beautiful! I shall love her, and fight all her battles for her."

"I hope there will be no battles to fight," he answered.

"There will, and plenty, too," she said.

Those words had made the young lord anxious, and he had gone to see his mother. She looked very stately and very handsome that morning. She wore a tight-fitting dress of some black material, with rich ruffles of point-lace at the wrist and the throat, her white hands shone with jewels; the point lace on her hair was fastened with a golden arrow. She looked up with a doubtful smile when her son entered. She did not return his hearty embrace. Then he went to the fire-place, and stood watching her with anxious eyes.

"Tell me, mother," he said, "what you think of my wife. Every word you utter in praise of her will be sweetest music to my ears."

Then Lady Ryvers laid down the pretty pen with which she had been busy, and, pushing aside her writing-desk, went to her son and stood by his side. She laid her hand on his shoulder, with a gesture that with her meant a caress.

"My dear Randolph," she answered, slowly, "I do not like your wife at all. I am sorry to pain you. After the entire devotion of my life to you, I hoped that you would bring me a daughter-in-law somewhat to my taste and one whom I could love. It is not so."

She never forgot the little cry of pain that came from his lips, nor the haggard expression that seemed in one moment to crush out the beauty of his face.

"I will not reproach you," continued the dowager, "although I am quite at a loss to know why you acted as you did. I think, after I had devoted my life to you and to your interest, the least you could have done would have been to consult me in the choice of a wife; you failed to do so."

"My dearest mother, I fell in love," he said, as though that would excuse everything. "I never thought I should do such a thing."

"It would have been just as easy to have fallen in love, as you phrase it, with a girl in your own rank of life."

"My dearest mother, Violet is a lady," he remonstrated.

"There are ladies and ladies," Lady Ryvers rejoined, sententiously. "You cannot say that she is a gentlewoman. Even granted that you fell in love, Randolph, you should have consulted me."

"I acknowledge," he said, with that graceful humility which sits so well upon a proud man, "I ought to have done so. Still, mother, in love and marriage a man is supposed to please himself. It is the one great action on which the comfort or misery of his life depends."

"For that very reason you should have consulted me," his mother persisted. "Marriage is such an important event. Since you have grown up it has been my greatest wish to see you allied to some charming girl of high position. The only thing was that none seemed good or pretty enough for you; and now—".

The "now" was suggestive enough; but Lord Ryvers would not notice it. She went on:

"I tell you quite candidly, Randolph, your marriage is

the great disappointment of my life. Your father's death was a sorrow that was bearable ; this is unbearable. I shall be ashamed to take my place in the world again. You might have done so well, and you have done so badly. Your marriage will make you the laughing-stock of all our friends."

"I do not think so, mother ; but even if the world laughs until it is tired, I do not care."

"I do," declared Lady Ryvers. "Our name as hitherto been one which men have uttered with respect. You have brought the first shadow upon it."

"You are wrong," he said. "It is true that Violet had no money, no position ; but those are trifles compared with her beauty and her grace. Then I loved her—I loved her ! My life would have been all dark," he cried, "but for her. You will find that when Violet takes her place in the world she will be one of its queens ; she has in her all the elements of a grand and noble womanhood. It is not as though she were ignorant or badly trained ; you speak of her as though she were entirely uneducated. I care very little about the laughter or approval of the world, mother."

There were deep lines on Lady Ryvers' forehead, lines her son had never seen there before. He stooped down to kiss them away, and for half a minute she clung to him with a softening of her proud face.

"Your wife tells me some strange story about not having known you were Lord Ryvers," she said, presently. "She even declared that she would rather have died than have married you had she been aware of your position and title."

"She is such a Radical," he said, smiling. "It is perfectly true, mother. I am sure, if she had known that I was a nobleman and a rich man, she would not have married me. You have no idea what a perfect little Democrat she is."

"How strange for you to ally yourself with a Democrat !" said Lady Ryvers.

And then Lord Ryvers gave his mother a full account of his love-affair and his marriage, from the time he had sung to himself in the bonny woods of St. Byno's of "June's palace paved with gold" until he stood before her. When he had finished, she looked at him long and earnestly ; then she said :

"Randolph, are you quite sure there is no flaw in the marriage ?"

"Flaw!" he cried. "Certainly not. I took care of that. Why do you ask me such a question?"

"If there had been," she replied, despairingly, "I hate the marriage so much that I should have asked you to set it aside."

Lady Ryvers had known her son only as sweet-tempered and yielding, but she saw the other side of the picture now. She never forgot the anger that flashed from his eyes, the pained wonder and surprise that darkened his face.

"Mother," he cried, "I will not believe that you mean what you say. It is vile, horrible! How you can utter such words I cannot imagine. If there were a flaw, you may believe me that I would very soon have the ceremony performed a second time."

"I may as well say all I think," said the dowager, looking very white and desperate. "I hate the very idea of your marriage. ~~and~~ I would do anything in the world to see it annulled. From the first moment that I heard of your imprudent match I hoped that some formalities had been omitted that would render your union invalid. You may call the hope vile, wicked, horrible, what you like; but I—I am desperate! Oh, Randolph, if there be any chance, let this horrible *mésalliance* be ended!"

"Mother," he answered, "I think you are mad! I am a gentleman; I have wooed and won one of the sweetest and purest of girls for my wife. What wickedness is it that you suggest! Can a man play with his own honor? Can he trifle with the fair name of the woman he has married? Oh, mother, I wish you had never uttered such horrible words!"

"I repeat them. You will mar and spoil your own life; you cover me with shame and humiliation. If there be a chance to set aside this foolish marriage, seize it; you were only a thoughtless boy. The same thing happened to young Lord Bardwell. The family solicitor discovered a flaw in his marriage; it was annulled, and he married the great Grafton heiress. Surely you may do what he has done?"

"Not I. Mother, I am a gentleman and an honest man. I would rather die than be guilty of so foul and horrible a deed. I have already told you that, if there were any flaw in my marriage—and I feel sure there is not—I would marry Violet again to-morrow. I will be satisfied on this point; I will take legal advice upon it."

"So will I," said Lady Ryvers. "I will not see a chance lost if I can help it."

"Oh, mother," he cried, "what a bitter sorrow it is to me to hear you say such words! I thought you so noble—so above all this."

"And I am equally disappointed in you," declared Lady Ryvers. "I have only said what every mother with sense and reason would say."

"Heaven help the sons of such mothers!" exclaimed Lord Ryvers. "Mother, if you wish to keep what you have always had, my affection and respect, you will never speak of this again."

"I see," said Lady Ryvers, "that you are not in the humor for listening to me with attention. If you were, I should suggest that, for the present at least, nothing be said about your marriage—that is, no introductions should be made; let the girl remain with us in retirement until she has caught some of the well-bred and graceful manner that distinguishes your sisters. It will be a sacrifice for me. She was so rude to me last evening, I had resolved not to remain in the house with her."

"I should not like to remind you, mother, that the house is mine," he said, "and that my wife will always remain in it"—words which redoubled the dowager's hatred for Violet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"YES, you have caught me in tears, and I am ashamed of it," cried Monica Ryvers; "but I cannot help it. No girl in the world has more cause for grief than I have."

"I should have thought," returned Violet, "that no girl in the world ever had less. It seems to me that you have everything your heart can desire."

"How little people know of each other, after all!" said Monica, with a sigh. "We live in the same house, breathe the same air, bear the same name, and yet we are further apart even than those who have great seas between them. I live with you, yet how little I know of you, except the outward superficial life that every one knows and sees. You live with me, and it is just the same. You know the Monica Ryvers whom you meet in the society of others; but you do not know the real Monica Ryvers."

"It is perfectly true," answered Violet. "I have thought of it before. I did not, for instance, think it was reasonable for you to weep; you seem so bright, so animated, so different in some respects from other girls, that it would have been unnatural to think of your indulging in grief."

"The Monica Ryvers you know never dares make any display of her feelings; it is the real Monica who sheds hot, bitter tears with good reason. The real Monica has a love-story."

"A love-story?" said Violet. "How beautiful! I never had a love-story."

"You never had a love-story?" cried Monica. "Why, of all people in the world you must have had the sweetest!"

"You are mistaken," said Violet.

"But do you not call my brother's romantic wooing of you a love-story? Had you ever a lover besides my brother?"

"No, never."

"You had no sweetheart, no admirer, no one who ever made love to you?"

"No," repeated Violet.

"My brother was the only man, or rather is the only man, who ever spoke to you of love and marriage?"

"The only one," replied Violet. "There were no young men where I lived; and, if there had been any, they would not have come within a hundred miles of my aunt."

"Then, Violet," said Monica, solemnly, "rely upon it that what I am going to tell you is true; my brother loves you a thousand times better than you love him. It seems to me that he fell in love with you, but that you, not having been accustomed to men, and not knowing much of life, did not know the difference between fancy and love."

"I am not so sure of that," answered Violet.

"I am," declared Monica. "I have thought so ever since you have been here. If any great trouble came, I do not think you would take his side."

"We will not talk about it," said Violet. "I should not like to wake up, as from a dream, and find that I had married a man I did not love."

"I should not be much surprised at that happening some day, Violet," averred her sister-in-law. "I am a good judge of love, because I am so much in love myself--more

than you have ever been," she added, with a wise little toss of the head. "For the man I love I could go through anything—fire and water. I would walk to him over red-hot plowshares; I would give my life for him. You would not do so much for my brother; I know it. You cannot even bear with mamma for his sake. I look at you when mamma is what I call awkward or spiteful, as she is to you at times, and I see that you do not love Randolph well enough to bear it patiently for his sake. If I might but even live in the same town with my lover, I would bear all that twenty mothers-in-law could make me suffer."

Violet's beautiful eyes were fixed upon her in untold wonder. The two girls had gone out together to feed the peacocks, which were sunning themselves on the lawn. Violet had been at the Castle for three weeks now, and they had certainly not been three weeks of bliss. To make matters worse than they had been, the Earl of Lester was invited; and his mother-in-law took him into her confidence, and told him all she thought and felt on the subject of her son's wife.

But, when she confided to him her intense desire to annul the marriage, if possible, even the Earl of Lester felt shocked.

"I do not think it possible," he said; "and, even if it were, I do not think it would be right."

"There is no right or wrong in the matter!" cried the dowager, passionately. "The whole affair is a huge mistake; the sooner it is ended the better."

"But on what ground can you seek to annul the marriage?" asked the Earl, almost as much surprised as Lord Ryvers had been. "You cannot attempt to dissolve it because the girl has no fortune and no position."

"That is true. My objection would be that he was not of age when he married, and could not marry legally without my consent."

"It would not hold," replied the Earl. "If you will take my advice, Lady Ryvers, you will not attempt anything of the kind. You have no chance of success, and your son will never forgive you."

"I shall certainly try my best, whether I succeed or fail," she declared.

And from that moment Violet had a strong partisan in the young Earl.

"I cannot understand," he said to his wife, "why your mother makes such a terrible fuss. She seems to hate the girl. I think she would do her any and every possible injury. She is, without doubt, one of the most beautiful and charming girls I have ever seen. I do not, as a rule, believe in unequal marriages; nor do I call this one. Violet has beauty enough and distinction enough to make up for all deficiencies."

The Countess languidly opened her eyes. It was something quite novel to hear her husband speak so earnestly.

"You seem to have suddenly grown very fond of your sister-in-law," she said.

"And no wonder," rejoined the Earl. "She has more life and animation than twenty ordinary women put together."

"I am very glad that I am an ordinary woman, and relieved from the trouble of being so animated," observed the Countess.

"My dear Marguerite," said the Earl, "you are perfection itself in your ways. Animation would not suit your imperial style."

The Countess of Lester had never been jealous—she had always been so serenely confident of her own powers of pleasing—but just the smallest tinge of jealousy colored her thoughts, and caused her to shun Violet more than she had done before.

The Earl was most attentive to her. They agreed and quarreled, laughed and disputed the whole day long. Lord Lester was amused at her notions. He called her a Democrat, a Radical; and she, with all the eloquence and earnestness of her nature, denounced him as an aristocrat. He delighted in drawing her out, in rousing her, in debating with her, and the result was that they became the greatest of friends; and the strongest ally Violet had in the house was the Earl of Lester. He had no patience with the dowager Lady Ryvers or with his wife. Why they could not accept Violet as one of their own he could not think. More than once the dowager had regretted sending for this son-in-law who had taken the very opposite side to the one she intended him to take.

The family was pretty well divided now, and, as Monica said, there was every chance of "a lively time." The dowager Lady Ryvers and the Countess, her daughter, were

against the Earl of Lester and Monica, the cause of dispute, of course, being Violet.

Monica and Violet were thrown very much together. On this morning, when they had gone out to feed the peacocks, Monica had taken a letter from her pocket; and it was over this that Violet had found her crying.

"Violet," said Monica, suddenly, "come down to the fountains with me; I must tell you my story. I must talk to some one, or my heart will break. You will think I am very young to have a lover. Marguerite is the eldest of us all—she is nearly three-and-twenty; Randolph, you know, is one-and-twenty; I am nineteen. But, Violet, do you know, I had a lover when I was sixteen? It sounds almost absurd, but it is true. I must tell you about it."

There was a square in the midst of the grounds whereon stood three fountains made from the finest Carrara marble, sculptured by the hands of the great master of the day. Seats and shrubs and flowering plants had been placed around them, so that the whole presented a most picturesque appearance.

It was thither the two girls went, and two men looked after them with longing eyes—Lord Ryvers, who happened to have an appointment to meet his steward, and Lord Lester, who would have followed them but that his wife was keeping guard over him. They sat down near where the silvery spray fell into the marble basin, making soft music as the tiny drops fell: about them the pigeons fluttered, but on this morning Violet's whole attention was given to her companion, and not to them.

"I have had a letter," said Monica, "which is breaking my heart. Violet, be patient with me while I cry; all the morning the tears have been lying behind my eyes, until even my eyelids ache: and mamma wanted so many things, and Marguerite was so tiresome—I think it is a great infliction to have a sister a countess! Oh, Violet, let me cry!"—and Monica laid her head on the marble basin, and wept as if her very heart would break.

Violet spoke no word; she saw that, whatever the trouble might be, words would not touch it.

When the paroxysm of weeping had ended, Monica looked up with half-drowned eyes.

"I am ashamed," she said, "but I cannot help it; I can-

not, indeed. I must give vent to my feelings. He is going away, and I shall never see him again."

"Tell me about it," said Violet, her heart warming to the girl who seemed so unhappy.

"That is what I want to do," returned Monica; "I know you will keep my secret. I must tell you first, Violet, that when I was sixteen mamma left me here with my governess, Miss Rowley, while she went to London with Marquerite for the season. It was then that the Earl of Lester fell in love with my sister, although they were not married until some time afterward. Miss Rowley was very clever and very conscientious; but during mamma's absence she was not well, and I had plenty of time on my hands for the mischief I found to do. Every day I had a certain quantity of work allotted to me, which I contrived to get through as speedily as possible, so that I might have more leisure for myself. One morning I went to St. Michael's Well, and there, seated on one of the great mossy stones, was a young man wearing the uniform of a cavalry officer.

"I must tell you," went on Monica, "that the Rector of Ryverswell belongs to a very old family—the Caerlyons of Caerswell. The family is old and so honorable that even mamma respects and esteems them, and speaks of them as people of some consideration. The rector, the Honorable and Reverend Hugh Caerlyon, is one of the younger sons of a younger branch of this great family; but he is, to use mamma's expression, wretchedly poor, having nothing but his income as Rector of Ryverswell—and that is not much. Mrs. Caerlyon is dead; I never heard anything of her. If there had been a mother living, I should not have fallen into such mischief.

"You must understand, Violet, that the rector often visited us. Mamma in some respects considered him her equal; she forgave his poverty on account of the antiquity of his family. He came often to dine with us. I am not sure whether mamma knew that he had a son. No one ever mentioned him, until one day the rector told us, with great glee, that his son had been presented with a commission in the famous regiment of the Black Lancers. After that, nothing more was said of him. It was this very son, this Paul Caerlyon, whom I found by St. Michael's Well. His regiment had been ordered to Queenshow, a large garrison

town not far from Ryverswell, and he spent a great deal of time at his father's house.

"He knew me, although I did not know him. He did not seem to be at all embarrassed, but told me what a favorite spot of his St. Michael's Well was. We became very good friends. Ah, no, that is not the truth! We were never friends; we were lovers from the first moment we met.

"Yes, lovers! I was sixteen, but he was more than twenty. Oh, Violet, how handsome he was! His complexion was dark; and he had dark-blue eyes and black hair. I know every line of his face by heart, because, you see, I worship it. He had a slight dark mustache, but it did not hide the full firm lips. Looking at them when they were closed, one thought how firm and brave and determined he was; looking at him when he smiled, one thought he had the tenderness of a woman. He had ridden over from Queenshow after some regimental exercise, and had walked from his father's house to see his favorite spot. There, by the side of the deep, dark water, by the cool, mossy stones, in the shade of the tall cliff, we met our fate. When he spoke to me, my heart went out to him; and oh, Violet, Violet, it has never come back to me! When I looked at him, a new light came over the earth and sky, a sudden sense of gladness and beauty thrilled my whole being; all at once I seemed to know and understand a hundred things that had been mysteries to me before. Violet, did you feel this when you saw my brother first?"

"No, I did not. I thought more of his picture than I did of himself, as far as I can remember."

"Then most certainly you were not in love," said Monica. "I have always told you so. You married Randolph because he was the first man who made love to you, or who asked you to marry him."

"Do you think so?" questioned Violet, gravely.

"I am sure of it. You had better try to fall in love with your husband; you certainly did not with your lover. The world was never the same to me from that moment; it will never be the same again. That is falling in love,—the world, your own life, everything changes; you could not get back to your own old self if you tried."

"Then I have never been in love,—at least, not in your fashion?" Violet said, thoughtfully.

"I cannot tell you," continued Monica, "how long we talked. If I had been a young queen instead of a school-girl, he could not have treated me with greater respect. He walked half the way home with me. It was such a sweet, mad folly, Violet—so sweet while the spring-tide lasted. Do you know that the odor of the hawthorn turns me faint? Even now it brings back those happy days very forcibly to me. It was such a spring as comes only once in life. It lasted from the second day of May, when I first saw him, until the middle of June, when my mother and sister came home. We met sometimes in the park down by the ruins; we used to sit by the old arched windows where the great clusters of blue-bells grew. I know it was wrong. I know that, having met him once by accident, I ought never to have met him again. I know that I deceived my mother, my governess, and every one else; but I have suffered. Oh, Violet, I have paid a terrible price for my folly! I have to live and pretend to be happy while my heart is breaking. I do not remember that we actually made any appointments; it seemed to be an understood thing that we should see each other every day. Every day my handsome young soldier rode over from Queenshow, and at last—at last he told me he loved me, and asked me if I would be his wife.

"I can now see the whole scene. We were standing in a clover-meadow under the great spreading boughs of some lime trees. I see the slanting sunlight on the grass, the pink may on the hedges. I see the little white lambs at play; I hear the sweet singing of the birds above our heads. I never look at the lime-boughs or the clover now.

"He asked me to be his wife, and I said 'Yes' gladly, willingly. Yes; I—do not be shocked, Violet—I flung my arms round his neck, and laid my head on his breast; every beat of my heart was his.

"We were so happy—oh, Violet, so happy! We quite forgot that I was the daughter of a rich, fashionable lady, and that he was a poor soldier, with little but his regimental pay. We forgot that there could be poverty, privation, opposition; we remembered only love.

"Before that month of May was over, our hearts were so knitted together, our two souls had grown so completely one that death could not part us; yet we shall never be married. I never thought of opposition; the golden

glamour of love lay all around us. The only evil we anticipated was that we should be compelled to wait until I was older.

"My love she's but a lassie yet," Paul delighted in singing. "Your mother will be sure to say that we must wait," he said to me often. "I will not write to her while she is in London; I will wait until she comes home. I can speak better than I can write."

"And, Violet, will you believe that, although I knew mamma, her ideas and peculiarities, I never dreamed of her refusal?"

"Then came a letter from mamma to me, in which she told me the great news that the Earl of Lester had proposed to my beautiful sister Marguerite. I remember every word of my mother's letter.

"The match, though a magnificent one, is no more than I expected with Marguerite's serene grace and beauty. And now a few words for yourself, Monica. Hasten on with your lessons, pay especial attention to deportment and manners, for next season I shall take you to town, and I shall expect you to do even better than your sister has done."

"I read this to Paul. I put my arms round his neck; I drew his face down to mine and kissed it.

"I have done a thousand times better than she can ever do!" I cried. "No girl in the world is so fortunate as I am."

"But a shadow fell over Paul's bright face. After that, if possible, he loved me more, he came more often. How it was that we escaped detection I cannot think. It seems to me now miraculous. When the moon shone I went to the ruined arches, and we walked there, always talking—oh, how blind we were!—always of the beautiful future before us.

"Then my mother and sister returned. The Earl of Lester came on a visit. Several guests also arrived. We had a dinner-party on the day after my mother's return, and the rector was invited. I heard him telling my mother about his handsome young soldier-son, and my mother said he must come and see her. He was coming, although no one guessed his errand. He came the next morning. It was a bright June morning, and the whole party were out on the white terrace.

"Who is that handsome young man?" asked Lady

Belfour, one of our guests. ‘What a noble head and face!’

“My own face burned, my foolish heart beat fast. I longed to cry out that he was my lover—my brave, beautiful young lover—and that he was going to marry me.

“I saw my mother’s eyes fixed on my face, and a horrible sense of coming evil took possession of me. My mother, you know, Violet, is one of the shrewdest, quickest people in the world. Paul came up, looking so brave, so handsome, so gallant, the sun shining on his face and his hair; and, when he saw me—I was standing next to Lady Bel four—such a light came into his eyes that it was not difficult to guess our secret.

“My mother received him very kindly, though she did not ask him to stay. Lord Lester was amiable and interested; all the ladies praised him, and said how handsome he was. And it struck me—it may have been my fancy but it struck me that most of them smiled just a little when they glanced at me. He lingered, poor boy, but no invitation to remain for luncheon came. When he bade my mother good-by, she smiled at him—Violet, how can people smile when they do cruel things?—and said:

“Will you tell your father that, if he is riding near the Castle to-day, I wish he would call?”

“I should imagine the Honorable and Reverend Hugh Caerlyon took those words as a royal command, for he came that same afternoon. I learned afterward from Paul what she had said to him. She congratulated him on his son’s good looks, and on his prospects, and then added, with a smile—oh, Violet, my mother’s smiles make me tremble at times!—that she had something very especial to say to him.

“Your son must not come here, my dear Mr. Caerlyon; he is far too handsome. Although I admit that he is brave, gallant, and, in fact, as fine a young man as one might wish to see, still you quite understand that he would not be eligible. I have two or three young ladies here whose mothers have trusted them with me, and I must not introduce an ineligible young Adonis like your son. Besides, there is my own daughter.”

“The good rector knew nothing of our mad love affair so that he did not look in the least degree guilty.

“Perhaps you are wise,” said the rector; “at the same

time, you are rather hard. It seems that my son's good qualities are the cause of his being deprived of your society.'

"' Precisely so,' said my mother. ' Those same good qualities render him a great deal too charming.'

" But, Violet, before the rector reached home my lover's patience had given way. He had written a long letter to my mother, telling her how dearly he loved me, and asking if he might make me his wife. The most terrible moment in my life was when my mother came to me, her face dark with frowns, and that letter open in her hands.

"' Will you follow me, Monica ?' she said.

" I knew that tone of voice well. It froze the blood in my veins. Still, in my happy ignorance, I said to myself that no one could part me from my lover ; no matter what any one did, or said, or thought, I could not be parted from him. My mother led the way to her own boudoir, the same pretty room you were in yesterday. If she had sat down, she would have looked less terrible to me. There she was, so proud, so tall, so stately, her eyes flashing ominously and dark frowns on her brow. I remember, Violet, the very square of carpet on which I stood ; I remember the red rose that came peeping in at the window. My mother looked at me for some minutes in silence ; then she said :

"' I am trying not to be angry, Monica ; I want you to tell me the meaning of this.'

" She placed my lover's letter in my hands. My tears fell upon it hot and fast. It was so touching, so beautiful, I wondered that she herself could read it without tears. It told how he loved me, and how every hope of his bright, eager young life was wrapped up in me.

"' I am trying,' repeated my mother, ' not to be angry. We must not be too hard on the faults and follies of youth. How this boy found the audacity to write this letter I cannot think ! I do not blame you ; I shall not even ask you any questious about it ; but, understand, the nonsense must be ended at once. Read that letter through.'

* I read it through my fast-falling tears.

"' You see,' said my mother, haughtily, ' how far the young man's presumption leads him. A young penniless soldier, and yet he asks for the hand of my daughter ! Thinking of the brilliant match that Marguerite is making

causes me to feel more lenient, or I should send the letter to his father, and advise him to use a horsewhip.'

"I love him, mother," I said, "and I shall never love any one else while I live."

"She laughed, Violet—such a laugh; I hear it now in my dreams.

"A schoolgirl of your age knows nothing of love, should know nothing of it. The word has not even a decent sound on your lips; it has not, indeed. I do not know, I cannot tell, what the world is coming to when a child of your age talks about love. You may be sure of this, that, if I hear the word again, I will lock you up in your room, and give you bread and water for a day or two to bring you to your senses. I will ask no questions; perhaps, if I knew the whole truth, I should be more distressed, more angry than I am. I will answer this letter. I shall tell him that he must not come to the house again. I should not like to resort to stronger measures, such as forcing Mr. Caerlyon to resign the living which is in your brother's gift. I shall write to the young man and tell him what I think of his impertinence, forbid him to return to the house, forbid him to speak to you again, and, as soon as our visitors leave us, we shall go to Mount Avon."

"So in a few minutes all the brightness was taken from my life. I looked up into my mother's face. There was no softening, no relenting; it was so proud, so cold, so cruel, that my heart sunk. Should I never see my brave young lover again? I have a faint recollection of clinging to her, of kneeling to ask her to take pity on me, because I was so young, and I loved him so. I remember falling with my face toward the ground; and then all was a blank to me, a terrible blank. How the days passed I cannot tell; I was never conscious of anything but the one horrible pain; the one terrible blank. As I recovered, no one ever spoke to me of my lover; I never heard his name.

"But I saw him, Violet, once before we left Ryverswell —only once. It does not matter how. I have never seen him since. I was with him nearly an hour. He held me in his arms, he kissed me, and we swore to be true to each other until death. Violet, you must not think I am mad; but I feel the loving clasp of those arms and the warmth of those kisses now. We swore to be true to each other, and we shall each keep our vow. I do not think any two in the

world have ever loved each other as we do. It is all hopeless. I know that, after we reached Mount Avon, my mother had many letters from him—I know that he wrote often to me; but she returned all his letters unopened. I write to him whenever I have a chance of posting the letters unknown to my mother. You may think it wrong, Violet; I do not. If there had been anything against him except his want of money, it would have been a different thing; but he is just, brave, and generous, with a scorn for all meanness. If there were one blot on his character, one stain on his fair name, it would seem less unjust, less cruel; but there is nothing wrong, only that he has no money. He is well-born, well-bred, he is a gentleman and a soldier, he is brave and noble; but he is poor."

"It seems very cruel," said Violet, to whom this love story was a revelation. "What shall you do, Monica?"

"There is nothing to be done. I shall wait for him and love him all my life, just as he will love and wait for me."

"And in the meantime?" said Violet.

"In the meantime my heart is slowly breaking. I live my life, and I try to make the best of it. My mother made me go to London."

"You are not beautiful like Marguerite," she said; "but you have a style of your own. You are brighter and more piquant than your sister; just now that kind of thing is more in vogue than mere beauty. I shall expect you to make a better match than Marguerite."

"And, Violet," continued Monica, with a smile more sad than tears, "strange to say, and just because I did not want to make conquests, I had a crowd of suitors. How I hated them—savagely almost! I could never find words cruel enough for them; and they liked it—absolutely liked it. They said I was original, piquant, clever. They made me the rage and the fashion, while I hated them. My mother was delighted. She said her daughters would marry better than any other girls. And, Violet, you cannot imagine what kind of men fell in love with me. It would seem like vain boasting if I told you. A duke proposed for me. Only imagine—I might have been a duchess! Mamma almost shook me when I refused him. A great American millionaire made me an offer, and she went nearly wild with delight; but I tell her each time that a fresh suitor comes to me that I shall live and die true to Paul.

"This morning I have had a letter from him, and he says there is a rumor that his regiment, the Black Lancers will be sent to Africa. Oh, Violet, how am I to bear it, dear? I may never see him again. I would rather look once into his face and die than live fifty years without seeing him. There is one consolation for us, which is that, though we are parted we have ample faith in each other. My trust in Paul could never die; his in me, I am convinced, is equally firm. Can you imagine what it is to love one man with your whole heart, to have no other interest, yet never to see him, never to hear his name, to be with him only in dreams? Why, Violet, my life is full of pain, one long torture of suspense! I have no hope. Mamma will never relent, never consent to my marriage with Paul. Only one thing could be of any use to us; but it will never happen. If some one would die and leave Paul a large fortune, she would withdraw her veto at once. A year ago Paul wrote to me and suggested that we should get married at once; he said that when it was done and beyond recall my mother would forgive us; but how could I say 'Yes' and spoil his career? How could he keep a wife who would not bring him one shilling, he who has difficulty enough to keep himself? His father has little money to spare; he can help him only every now and then. Do you not see, Violet, I should be only a drag and a burden? In fact, I love him too well to accede to that wish.

"I have no money of my own," Monica went on plaintively; "mamma had all. She can either leave me a fortune or deprive me of one. She would not of course, give me one shilling if I married Paul. For myself I do not mind poverty at all; but I cannot drag him down into the depths. It would be selfish, and I love him better than myself."

"It seems a sad story," said Violet, "and I do not see what can be done to help you."

"Nothing can be done," Monica answered. "It is doubly hard for me. Just because I want no lovers and do not want mamma to think of matrimony in connection with me, I am overwhelmed with offers; even our beautiful Marguerite never had so many as I have had; and every fresh offer makes my mother so angry. Only last week that tiresome old Sir Thomas Macintosh, who is said to be one of the richest men in England, wrote to mamma and told

her——. Violet, I have not patience to repeat it, I have not indeed!—told her that he wanted to marry me, and that he was so anxious to make me his wife he would settle half his fortune on me if I would consent. Mamma implored of me to say ‘Yes,’ and in some way, I cannot tell how, Paul has heard of it, and has written to me. He knows I shall be true to him. If ever a girl means to be true to her love, and is true, I am that girl. I shall write to Paul to-day. But he seems so disheartened. He hears these rumors of my lovers, he hears rumors of his regiment going abroad, and he seems half distracted.”

“Write him a long, cheerful love-letter,” suggested Violet.

“Have you ever written a love-letter in your life?” asked Monica.

Violet answered “No.”

“If you had,” said the girl, simply, “you would know that it would be the most difficult thing in the world to write a cheerful one in circumstances like mine.”

* * * * *

“It does not seem to me,” said Monica Ryvers to her sister-in-law, “that you will ever feel quite at home here.” For Monica, suddenly entering one of the pretty drawing-rooms in ordinary use, found Violet idly seated there, and looking very despondent.

“I do not think I shall,” she answered—“the place is so large, so different from anything to which I have been accustomed; and I have nothing to occupy me. I was much happier in my aunt’s little house. And, oh, Monica, If I had but a garden !”

“A garden!” cried Monica, in wonder. “Why, my dear Violet, you have one of the largest in England. The Ryversdale gardens are unique.”

“So they may be; but they are not mine,” said Violet.

“They are your own, inasmuch as they belong to Randolph,” said Monica.

“It is very different,” returned Violet. “At my old home the garden was my own, as it were.”

As she spoke, a memory of the handsome face and love-laden eyes that had haunted the garden came back to her; and she knew in her heart that she loved Randolph far better in those days than in these. He had seemed nearer to

her, on a perfect equality with her. Now that she was won, magnificent as they were, she hated all his surroundings, she disliked most of his relatives and friends. Only Monica Ryvers and Lord Lester did she tolerate ; they were always kind and affectionate. Monica indeed loved her. The dowager Violet most cordially disliked ; she received no kindness from her. And Lady Lester was a person whom she completely failed to understand.

So gradually a shadow fell between herself and her husband, a coldness that was far more fatal than a lovers' quarrel.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN every little *fracas* that took place between Violet and the dowager Lady Ryvers, Randolph tried to make peace. His mother was hurt, thinking he ought to take her side. His wife was angry, feeling quite sure that he ought to fight her battles ; he himself felt hurt because Violet, for his sake, would not yield more. So the shadow deepened, the coldness increased. Not that Randolph loved his wife less—if possible, he loved her more—but he felt grieved because she did not try to conciliate those around her and to accommodate herself to her new circumstances.

On the other hand, **Violet** had always in her mind a sense of injury. Randolph had deceived her. No matter what his object or what his excuse, he had deceived her, and there was no possibility of forgetting it. In those days she never looked very deeply into her own heart, she never asked herself if she had loved the young artist better than she loved the young lord ; she made no effort to control the thoughts that were against him. She disliked her present mode of life and her surroundings. Where other girls would have been completely happy, she, owing to her peculiar training, was wretched. She longed for her old occupations ; she did not enjoy the life of a fine lady at all ; she did not care for luxuries ; she disliked the army of servants, disliked not being able to wait on herself—she could hardly raise her hand to do anything without some obsequious attendant immediately forestalling her ! She longed to run about freely, to be useful ; she resented the inactivity that brought with it no pleasure or enjoyment. While traveling, she had **not** felt this so much, but, once at home, the change from

old habits was but too perceptible. Above all, she felt the loss of the grand old garden. Certainly, at Ryversdale there were acres of land, conservatories, ferneries, forcing-houses, gardens laid out in the most elaborate Italian style, flowers of the richest and rarest, fruit of the most delicate and *recherché* kind; but there was nothing that could personally interest her. There were any number of gardeners under the skillful head-gardener, a Scotchman, who looked upon every leaf and blossom as sacred, and strongly objected to any one else touching them. Violet never felt at liberty to ramble through the well-kept gardens and gather fruit and flowers; she longed for the quaint, old-fashioned garden at home, where she had done as she liked.

"I should be much happier, Monica," she said, "if I had a piece of ground that was quite my own, where the gardeners would never interfere."

And Monica answered quickly that no time should be lost in gratifying her wish.

That very morning Monica sought her mother. She was with Randolph, looking over some accounts, when her daughter entered. In her desire to gratify her sister-in-law, Monica forgot that she might run the risk of vexing her mother, who was always wretched when any one was especially civil to Violet.

"Mamma," said Monica, "I am afraid Violet is very dull."

"That is Randolph's business, not mine. I should never undertake to amuse a person who is unwilling to be amused."

"Oh, mamma, Violet is as bright as the day," cried Monica—"naturally, I mean! But this morning she seems dull; she misses many things that she had at her own home."

The dowager's answer was a scornful laugh, which brought a hot flush to the young husband's face and an angry light to his eyes. He controlled himself, however, for he never cared to be anything but respectful to his mother.

"Of course," hastily added Monica, "it will be quite different when Violet goes into society. I can well imagine that just at present she does feel dull and lonely. Randolph has been busily engaged during the last week, and has not been much with her. I have been talking to her,

and she has told me of something that she would like very much."

Lady Ryvers went on writing as though she had not heard; but Randolph looked up quickly.

"What is it?" he asked. "Tell me, Monica."

"She misses the garden at her old home; it seems that that was her chief delight."

Lord Ryvers remembered it so well that his face flushed. It had been a very paradise to him, and he was pleased that she thought of it. Monica went on:

"These great gardens here do not seem to give her much pleasure. She has been saying how much she should like a piece of ground all her own, to grow what flowers and fruits she likes. I think it is very natural; really our gardens seem to be made more for our gardeners than ourselves."

"Of course she can have what ground she likes, and do as she likes with it, and in it," said Lord Ryvers.

"She will like to work in it herself," remarked Monica. "She likes to cultivate flowers and take care of them."

"I will go out at once and select a portion of the garden for her exclusive use," said Lord Ryvers. "I know exactly what she wants and what will please her. I am so glad you found it out, Monica."

"If your wife wishes also to keep a dairy," broke in the dowager, "you will make arrangements for it, I presume? It is quite a new thing for the ladies of Ryversdale to work on their own land!"

"How bitterly you speak, mother!" cried Randolph; while Monica looked away with a shrug of her shoulders that was far more expressive than words.

"I speak truthfully. I say that it is a misfortune when the mistress of a house like this has such excessively plebeian tastes; it is more unfortunate still when the husband encourages them."

"I do not see how you can call the cultivation of flowers a plebeian taste," said Lord Ryvers. "Why, mother, I have seen you yourself busy in the conservatory—busy, too, amongst your favorite roses."

"You have never seen me stain my hands with gathering fruit or soil them by weeding," said Lady Ryvers. "If your wife intends to work in a garden as she seems to have done, she will never be presentable. It is quite a

new idea to me. I thought only peasant-women used the spade and the hoe."

" You willfully misunderstand, mother," declared Randolph, angrily. " If either of my sisters had expressed such a wish, you would most cheerfully have acceded to it."

" It has nothing to do with me," said the dowager, sharply. " The land, the grounds, the house and all belonging to it, are yours. It does not concern me in the least. You can do what you like with your own. I merely warn you that your wife's tastes are plebeian, and that, if you begin to yield to them, you will not know where to stop. I advise you to refuse to gratify them, and to try to elevate them."

" You are not fair, you are not just, mother—indeed you are not," returned the young husband, gravely. " You look with prejudiced eyes at everything that Violet wants and wishes."

" Violet would have been much better left where you found her," said Lady Ryvers, contemptuously. " You might as well attempt to graft cabbages on rose-trees as to make a lady of a person who has been accustomed to work in gardens and dairies."

Randolph rose hastily from his seat. This was more than he could bear. He felt that his indignation was rapidly mastering him, and that words might be said which nothing could recall.

" Stay, Randolph!" cried her ladyship, in a voice of authority. " You are going, of course, to select a piece of ground to gratify this absurd whim of your wife."

" Most certainly, mother," he replied. " Any wish of Violet's shall be gratified so far as I am concerned."

The dowager rose from her chair, with a gesture of proud intolerance which struck dismay into the heart of her son.

" Not while I am here!" she cried. " I am staying at your request; your sisters are staying by my request in order that, by association with the person you have brought here as your wife, we may civilize her, if possible. I myself do not think it possible; she is more obstinate even than she is ignorant. I beg you to wait until I have left Ryversdale. The grounds and gardens of Ryversdale Castle have been my pride all my life. I could not endure to

see them cut up, or even disturbed, to gratify the whim of an ignorant and vulgar woman."

"Mother," said Randolph, trying to speak calmly, "you must know that this is intolerable to me. You may not like Violet—Heaven knows why!—but you do not think her either ignorant or vulgar; you merely say it to annoy me. My wife must be respected."

"Then do not let me be annoyed by seeing any nonsense of the kind proposed. If it must be done, let it be when I have left the castle."

Monica glanced at her brother.

"Let it be Randolph," she said, "for a short time. I am very sorry that I spoke or interfered. Mamma will excuse me; I had forgotten her prejudices."

"Do what you will to Ryversdale when I have left it," said her ladyship; "but for the present, for the few weeks that I am here, let everything remain as it is."

And in her heart she vowed again that she would do all that was possible to annul this horrible marriage. If Violet had been docile, yielding, deferential, it might have been more bearable; but this girl was proud as any Ryvers ever born.

Long after Randolph had quitted the room the dowager sat brooding angrily over her bitter disappointment. If her son had but married Gwendoline Marr, what a different matter it would have been! To have pleased a great heiress like Gwendoline Marr, she would have been willing to have seen the Ryversdale grounds undergo a complete change; but no change should be wrought to please Violet; not one plant should be removed to gratify her. If possible, Violet herself should be removed; and she longed heartily for that day to come.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RYVERSDALE looked very beautiful in its autumn dress. The chrysanthemums were all in flower, the Castle gardens being famous for them. Long before their bloom had faded, Violet, Lady Ryvers, had owned to herself that she was very unhappy. The dowager had kept to her resolve—no visitors had been asked to the Castle, no invitations issued as yet. Very little was known of Lord Ryvers' marriage, very few people had heard of it. The news

papers were silent concerning it, and most of the persons to whom it was mentioned declared that it could not be true, and refused to believe it. The young lord rebelled against this state of things. Still his mother had asked him, as a distinct personal favor, to keep his marriage secret for a short time, alleging as her excuse that she wished Violet to associate with herself and her daughters before she took her part in the world. Lady Ryvers had pointed out to him many little deficiencies in Violet which could be rectified only by attention and training.

" You must not take her into society until she has been civilized," said her ladyship, " unless you wish to brand her and yourself too. If you introduce her just as she is to the world, every one will know you have made a *mésalliance*."

" What is the matter with Violet, mother, that you are always finding fault with her?" asked the young lord.

" Your wife's greatest fault is that she is perfectly and undisguisedly natural," said her ladyship. " She has not been trained in any way; she does what she likes, she says what she thinks."

" And why not?" asked Lord Ryvers. " Seeing that all her actions are like herself, noble and graceful, all her thoughts grand and beautiful, why should she not do them, why not express them?"

" If she goes into society, she must conform to the rules of society," said Lady Ryvers; " and you know how utterly out of place a perfectly natural woman is. Violet—how I dislike the name!—is capable of saying anything to any one. She would tell the truth, for instance, if she offended the most important personage in England. She would express her opinion on a subject, no matter what proprieties she outraged. Given one or two such women as Violet, and the world would be all confusion."

" I am disposed to think rather that we should be much nearer heaven than we are now," returned Lord Ryvers. " Do I understand you rightly, mother, that my wife is not fitted for society until she has learned to move artificially, to speak untruthfully, to conceal her thoughts?"

" You willfully misunderstand me," said her ladyship. " I repeat that your wife is not fit to go into society until she understands its laws and rules."

"And those you and my sisters are to teach her?" said Lord Ryvers.

"She can learn them from us, if she chooses," answered her ladyship, proudly. "I shall not condescend to give her lessons. Marguerite is considered a perfect model of good manners; Monica, too, although somewhat animated, is very charming. When did Marguerite ever hurt any one with an unpleasant truth, or disturb the polished surface of society by one word out of place? Did you ever hear Marguerite express any raptures of joy or give way to any outburst of sorrow? She has her feelings perfectly under control. Let your wife try to copy her."

"My wife might as well transform herself into a marble statue," said Lord Ryvers. "The very beauty of Violet's face is the change of expression, the light that comes and goes in her eyes, the rose-bloom that changes in her face. Her eyes fill with tears of pity, her lips laugh sweetly when she is pleased, a hundred tender thoughts at times speak in her face, her very glance denounces all things mean—and yet you wish her to be like Marguerite! You may say what you will and think what you will, but I am quite sure that the world—at least, the men of the world—will never look at Marguerite when Violet is near. One tires in time of even the most beautiful marble statue; one never tires of a beautiful, intelligent, animated woman."

"Your sister should be flattered," said the dowager, haughtily. "I have given you the best advice I can; you must please yourself about following it."

Partly because he wished to conciliate his mother, and partly because he thought there might be some little truth in what she said, Lord Ryvers consented that some weeks should pass before his marriage was made public. He repented of this concession to his mother's wish most bitterly afterward.

Her ladyship was possessed by the notion that the marriage could be annulled; her idea was to gain time. She fervently hoped to prejudice her son against his wife, and if she could not do that, she had made up her mind to a certain course. She would write to one of the most famous lawyers in England, and ask if there was no flaw in the marriage. If there were one, she would make her son take his choice of annulling his marriage or giving up his mother. "If he can do it, and will not," she vowed to her-

self, "I will never see him or speak to him again. If it cannot be annulled, I shall insist on living with them, and she shall never have any authority in this house."

And in the meantime she made Violet suffer as much as possible. If she could have guessed at the thoughts that went through the girl's mind, she would have been more merciful. The smallest thing, the lightest word, gave her some pretext for cruelty to Violet. As a rule, the girl represented it, but showed her anger by proud silence; at other times, when she felt tired or unhappy, she would weep bitterly.

She came down to breakfast one morning in a fashionable morning costume purchased in Paris, but it was not becoming to her.

"I do not like your dress, Violet," said the Countess of Lester, who, according to her light, was endeavoring to form the mind, the taste, and the manners of her sister-in-law. "It does not suit your style."

"I hardly knew I had a style," laughed Violet, "when that was sent home. I should not have kept it if I had known as much of dress then as I do now."

"I always thought the instinct for true and correct taste in dress was born with every lady," said the Countess.

"You are quite right," put in the dowager. "It is born with every lady; it is not given to every one."

If Lord Ryvers had been there, he would have indignantly silenced his mother, who was speaking in her haughtiest tone of voice.

"I consider it a criterion," she said. "One may always know a lady by her taste in dress."

"Your ladyship's remarks are leveled at me," said Violet, "and would seem to indicate that you do not consider me a lady. I think consideration for other people's feelings far more an indication of nobility than taste in dress."

"Your ideas are provincial," replied the dowager. "There is no more to be said."

"How I hate her!" cried Violet, afterward, in the solitude of her own room; and her hatred grew with every hour.

The dowager never lost an opportunity of making her feel her position. In her son's presence her ladyship exercised some little control over her words, but not when he was absent. She then made no attempt to conceal her bit-

ter disappointment with regard to her son's marriage ; she never lost an opportunity of taunting her with it, lamenting the ruin of his prospects, the utter spoiling of his life.

All these taunts seemed to set Violet's heart against her husband. He found her one morning in her room, her beautiful eyes half drowned in tears, her lovely face pale and troubled. He caught her in his arms and clasped her to his breast ; he kissed the white eyelids and the quivering lips.

" You have been crying, my darling," he said. " Tell me why ; I will know. You shall not shed any tears. You shall not be troubled, or vexed, or grieved. What is it ? "

But she would not tell him. Tortures would not have dragged the truth from her. She had been nobly loyal to her resolve. She had uttered no complaint of the mother to her son, and never would. She was proud of her own courage in keeping her resolve, although there were times when some scathing word from the dowager, some cruel insult, would send her, flushed and quivering with rage, from the room.

" You shall not be annoyed, Violet," cried Lord Ryvers. " I insist upon you telling me what is the matter. You are the dearest object in life to me ; your happiness is my first thought, and always shall be."

For once the girl's pride and courage broke down utterly.

" Oh, Randolph," she cried, bitterly, " why did you marry me ? You knew the difference which existed between our positions in life ; I did not. Why did you marry me ? " she reiterated.

" To make you happy—and I mean to do so," he answered. " Violet, every tear of yours is rending my heart."

" Why did you marry me ? Why did you bring me here ? I hate it all ! I shall never be happy ! It was a cruel thing of you to do. You must have known that your mother and sisters would never like me ! "

" Why, Monica loves you !" he cried—" loves you more than she does Marguerite, I am sure ! I never thought of my mother and sisters ; I thought only of you. If you are not happy here, I will take you away again ; you shall not be unhappy anywhere, my beautiful wife. I have been weak and foolish to give in to my mother's whims. She thought it would be so much better if you spent a few

weeks here with her and my sisters. I wish I had refused. What do you say, darling?"—for, with trembling lips, she had whispered something into his ear. "Thorns in your orange-blossoms!" he exclaimed. "No, my darling, you shall have none. If there must be thorns, they shall fall to my lot, not yours. I will wear them, and you will wear the orange-blossoms. My darling, do you not know that I love so well I would quarrel *& outrance* with mother, sisters, and every one else in the wide world for your sake?"

"But that should not be," she said. "You ought to have married some one whom they would all have loved, like the girl they are always talking about—Gwendoline Marr."

"Neither Gwendoline Marr nor another would I ever have made my wife," he said—"only you. Violet, my darling, you shall not be made unhappy. Tell me what has grieved you."

But he could not draw one word from her, the fact being that the dowager had told her that she had ruined her son's life, that but for her he could have married into any of the noblest families in England, and that, as it was, she did not see how he could go into society again.

"A man's marriage either makes or mars him," concluded the dowager, forcibly, "and my son's unhappy marriage has most certainly marred him."

Violet listened in proud silence. She contented herself by saying over and over again, "If this be a lady, I am thankful that I am a daughter of the people." But when she was alone her anger and indignation found vent in tears.

Lord Ryvers could not soothe her.

"You ought not to have married me," she said, presently. "It was cruel to yourself, to me, and to your family."

Her words seemed to pierce his heart.

"How could I help it," he asked, "when I love you so?"

She raised her lovely eyes, streaming with tears, to his face.

"It seems to me," she said, "that in marrying me the person you thought most of was yourself."

And the words struck him like a blow, yet he felt that they were true.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LORD RYVERS had made a resolve. He could not be wanting in courtesy to his mother; he could not, after her long reign in the house, ask her abruptly to leave it; but he would take his wife away. In his heart there was deep resentment against his parent, but he was too well-bred a gentleman and too good a son to put it into words.

He was sorely disappointed. He had not thought that his mother would hold out in this fashion—in fact, his love had been so great he had thought of nothing else. And now the whole world seemed to lie in ruins about him, and the only certainty he felt was that his beautiful young wife was miserable. This state of things could not last; he must put an end to it; and, if he did not like to ask his mother to go, he must take his wife away himself. He had made up his mind to this; but Fate forestalled him.

It so happened that one chill afternoon Lord Ryvers, feeling vexed and grieved that those he loved best did not love each other, went out on the terrace to solace himself with a cigar. While he was walking there, looking with admiring eyes at a copper-beech on which the sunshine lay, Lord Lester joined him.

"Randolph," he said, abruptly, "if Violet were my wife, I should not feel happy about her. She has lost her beautiful bloom, she is growing thinner and paler, she does not look happy. I repeat, if she were my wife, I should be anxious about her."

"She is not happy," returned Lord Ryvers. "I see it plainly enough, and I am puzzled what to do. I want my mother to like her; but I am beginning to fear she never will."

"Never!" declared the Earl. "The prejudices on both sides are too strong. The only thing you can do is to keep them apart."

"I fear so; but that seems hard on my mother, who has been mistress here all her life."

"It is useless to speak of the past," said Lord Lester. "It was a quixotic business from first to last. Forgive my saying so, but you ought to have married in your own sphere. These quixotic love-affairs never answer. You

have virtually separated yourself from your mother by your marriage ; your first care now must be your wife."

The words haunted Lord Ryvers. With all his passionate worship of Violet, was it possible that he had committed a blunder in bringing her home to his mother, and in trying to make them friends ?

He went in search of her when Lord Lester sauntered away to rejoin his Countess, who was growing tired of family battles and quarrels. He found her at the fountain.

Lord Ryvers' face brightened when he saw her. Was there ever a woman so fair ? She stood watching the falling spray, rich draperies of gray velvet and silver fur falling round her, her beautiful face shadowed by a hat with a sweeping plume. But it was not the face of a happy woman ; the conviction of that went home to him. She was beautiful beyond compare, more statuesque in the full development of her magnificent womanhood ; but this was not the girl who had made him captive on the morning when he had sung of " June's palace paved with gold." There was a mournful look in her eyes, a deep shadow on her face, lines of pain were round the sweet mouth. As a wild bird pines in a cage, so she pined in the midst of the splendors which surrounded her. Oh, to be free, to stand once more in the old garden at home, to breathe the odor of the pine-woods, even with Aunt Alice scolding in the distance ! She hated this gilded splendor, she disliked all this retinue of servants, she detested the ways of the fine ladies about her, and she longed with all her soul for freedom.

He found her in this mood. Quite unconsciously, in her own mind, a certain resentment was growing against her husband. It was he who had brought her hither, who had forced upon her this splendor, luxury, and mortification.

He threw his arm round her ; but the dainty, lovely face no longer flushed and brightened for him. There was a wistful, set expression that touched him.

" I always find you thinking, Violet," he said, " I am sure, from your eyes, that your thoughts are not pleasant ones."

" They are not," she confessed, sadly.

" Violet," cried Lord Ryvers; " do you know that I have a horrible fear that you are not quite happy in the midst

of these surroundings, that you are even beginning to love me less?"

It was so exactly the truth, and she was so little prepared for it, that for a few moments she stood quite still, not knowing what to say.

"My darling," he continued, with a voice full of pain, "do you remember the days when I wooed you? Do you remember how you used to come to me with your eyes full of love and your sweet hands outstretched?"

She raised her eyes to his face; they were full of perplexity.

"You do not seem to me to be the same man," she replied. "The artist I met at St. Byno's and the lord of this great castle have a distinct individuality," she added, with sudden passion in her voice.

He recoiled from the words.

"They are not the same," she cried. "I feel in my heart they are not; I feel as though I could appeal to him against you."

"Yet what wrong have I done to you?" he asked.

"Every wrong," she answered. "You have taken me from my own sphere of life, you have placed me in the midst of luxury and splendor, you have brought me where I would not have gone myself."

"You would adorn any sphere, Violet," he said, earnestly.

"Your mother does not think so," she said. "You have brought me to a place where I shall never be at home, you have placed me with people I shall never like, and then you ask what wrong you have done me. It seems to me that my young lover of St. Byno's would have done none of these things."

"Darling, I am as much your lover now as I was at St. Byno's—nay, more. Here comes Monica with her dogs. Violet, I have only time to say a few words more. Have patience two or three days longer, and then you shall never have another regret. You shall be happy, my darling. Give me one kiss before Monica comes."

There was little warmth in the kiss; but Monica smiled when she saw the salute. She loved her beautiful, high-spirited sister-in-law, and wished that everything was *couleur de rose* for her.

"*L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.*" While Lord

Ryvers was thinking how he could best bring the tangled knot of his difficulties into one strand, the cloud was darkening over Ryversdale.

The greatest events in life often spring from slight causes, an awkward footman brought about the chief incident in the life of Violet, Lady Ryvers.

It was an evening in the first week in November, and the dowager Lady Ryvers had been considerably ruffled during the day; nothing had gone right with her, a hundred little trifles light as air had disturbed and annoyed her, she was not in the most amiable of moods. A footman, passing near her with a glass of wine on a small silver salver, stumbled, and the wine was spilled over the dress of purple velvet that her ladyship wore. That was the climax of her anger, and the consequences of it fell on the unfortunate footman. He was too clumsy, she declared, to remain in her service, and was accordingly dismissed at once. Two days later a new servant had taken his place. One of the duties of the footman had been to take the letters to the dowager. On the morning after his arrival he, being new to his duties, made what turned out to be a terrible mistake by taking the letters to Lady Ryvers instead of the dowager Lady Ryvers. There were but two, both addressed "The Lady Ryvers, Ryversdale Castle, Kent." Violet did not doubt for a moment but that they were hers, although she wondered who her correspondents could be.

The first envelope she opened contained a circular from the famous Madame Elise, which Violet read with some curiosity. Then she took up the second letter, and looked at it with some interest. Who would be likely to write to her? The envelope was large, thick, and blue; there was no crest or monogram. Although she wondered much from whom it came, Violet sat for some minutes with it unopened in her hand. She could not tell afterward whether it was some foreboding of coming evil that had made her defer breaking the seal. When at length she did so, she read the letter slowly; but she was long in understanding it perfectly.

"LINCOLN'S INN, London, Nov. 3d.

"DEAR MADAM,—In accordance with your wish, we have made every possible inquiry with regard to the circumstances attending your son's marriage. Mr. Macivors has himself been down to St. Byno's to investigate the matter personally. He has examined the

register, spoken to the clergyman, and the result is that he finds no formality has been omitted to render the ceremony valid. We are therefore in a position to state most positively that there is no flaw whatever in the marriage, which is perfectly legal in every way. By your ladyship's desire we have consulted one of the most eminent Queen's Counsel as to whether the marriage could be annulled on account of his lordship's being under age, and the opinion given is decidedly adverse. We consider nothing further remains to be done, and beg to subscribe ourselves your ladyship's obedient servants,

"BARNARD & MACIVORS.

"To the Lady Ryvers."

What did it mean? She knew no firm of Barnard & Macivors. Of whose marriage were they writing to her? Her mind seemed suddenly blank.

Then a terrible thought flashed into her mind, and idea so horrible that it seemed for a few moments to paralyze her. She read the letter again, and again looked at the address. It was not for her—that was certain. She had opened a letter intended for Randolph's mother, and had read its contents. Quite slowly the dreadful truth came home to her. She had opened her mother-in-law's letter, who had evidently been writing to this firm of lawyers to see if it were possible, on any ground whatever, to annul her marriage with Randolph.

Slowly but surely the truth came home to her. This was what her husband's mother had done. She sat silent for some time with the silence of despair; then she said to herself:

"I will take the letter to her, and I will annul my marriage myself."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE dowager Lady Ryvers was in her own boudoir, a room on the lower corridor of the west wing of the house. It was nearly ten o'clock, and a cold November morning. Her ladyship had ordered her breakfast to be sent to her own room. The fire burned cheerily in the grate. Her ladyship, in a warm dressing-gown, with a picturesque little cap of fine point-lace on her head, and holding the morning newspaper in her hands, looked the very picture of comfort.

She wondered just a little why she had had no letters that morning; she never thought of the new footman, or of the possibility of any mistake. She had been expecting an im-

portant letter from London for some days, but, as yet, it had not arrived.

That letter she fervently hoped would put an end to the present unpleasant state of things. With every day that passed her dislike to her son's wife increased, and she hoped to find that in the eyes of the law she was not really his wife. Then all would be plain sailing. She trusted to her own influence over her son; she willfully blinded herself to the fact that he worshipped his wife; she chose rather to believe that, if the law gave him a chance of escape from a tie she hated, he would avail himself of it.

Of course there would be a little scandal and wonder; that could not be helped. She comforted herself by thinking that many marriages had been annulled in this fashion—she remembered several. No one had thought it very strange or wrong. She knew that all the fashionable mothers would sympathize with her; she never thought at all of the harm she might do to Violet. Randolph could go to London in a season or so, and marry whom he would. She smiled to herself as she finished her chocolate. It did not occur to her that she had the strong passion and the lifelong love of a man to deal with. Randolph had always submitted to her sway; why should he not do so now?

Then, and most unexpectedly, came an interruption in the shape of a quick sharp rap at the door.

"*Entrez!*" said her ladyship, who considered the French word far more elegant than the English equivalent; and there entered Violet.

She was a new Violet to the dowager—no longer the girl she could insult and humiliate at will, but a stately woman, with head proudly carried and flashing eyes, a woman whose whole figure and bearing spoke of outraged dignity and pride. There was no hesitation, no faltering; Violet walked straight up to her, holding the open letter in her hand.

"By mistake," she said, "this letter, with another, has been brought to me this morning. As they were addressed to Lady Ryvers, not the dowager Lady Ryvers, I have opened and read them, thinking they were my own."

But the voice that spoke was not the voice of Violet; it was strained and hoarse, full of pain; nor were the lips that uttered the words like hers; they were white and stiff.

"Will your ladyship," she went on, "read this infamous

letter, and tell me if it be some miserable jest, or if it be true?"

For a few minutes the elder woman lost her presence of mind. She saw in a moment what the letter was, and understood, with her quick instinct, all that had happened. Her face flushed, her proud eyes fell, the jeweled hands trembled. The girl standing before her with set, scornful face, looked like an injured queen. The dowager felt almost like a criminal.

"Read it, and tell me if it be true," repeated Violet. And for a few seconds the two women looked at each other in silence that was more terrible than words.

Slowly enough her ladyship took the letter and read it. Violet stood still and erect before her. When she had finished, the dowager looked up.

"Well, what do you wish to know?" she asked coolly.

"I wish to know, first of all," said Violet, "if the letter to which that is an answer was written by you?"

"It was," answered the dowager, boldly.

"You have been trying to discover whether there was any flaw in my marriage with your son, in order that you might separate us?"

"I have done so," confessed the elder woman.

"You dislike—nay, I may say that you hate me so bitterly you would fain rob me of my fair name and my fair fame?"

"I am so anxious with regard to my son," replied her ladyship, insolently, "that I am indifferent to all else."

"You wish, then, that the marriage between myself and your son could be undone?" interrogated Violet.

"I do wish it with all my heart. I would give half I possess if it could be so arranged," said the dowager. "It is idle to withhold the truth from you. I have done my best; but unfortunately I have failed. I wrote to one of the most eminent firms of lawyers in London; as you have seen, they have given an unfavorable opinion."

"You have really been endeavoring to find some reason that would enable you to have my marriage annulled?" pursued Violet, steadily. "You tell me honestly that such is the case?"

"Yes. There is no need for any reticence in the matter. I have known three cases myself in which the marriage has been set aside as null and void because the supposed hus-

and was not of age. It seems that in my son's case there is no such loophole for escape."

With the same white, set face, Violet drew nearer to her.

"Tell me one thing more," she said, in a voice that the dowager never forgot until her dying day. "Does my husband know that you have done this?"

"I told him I should do it," replied her ladyship.

"And he has made no effort to stop you? He has allowed you to crown all your other insults with this?"

"He did not say one word to prevent it," she answered.

"Great Heaven—and they call this 'nobility!'" cried Violet. She went on trying to speak calmly, "If the answer to your most wicked and unwomanly letter had been 'Yes,' that in the marriage your son and myself thought perfectly legal there was a flaw, what should you have done?"

"I should have insisted on my son's taking advantage of it, and at any price have compelled him to have the marriage annulled," was the dowager's answer.

The two women stood for a few minutes looking fixedly at each other; then Violet, with a shudder, spoke as one just waking from a hideous dream.

"I will annul the marriage myself," she said, slowly and solemnly. "Your son deceived me. Had I known that he belonged to a class I hate, had I known that he would bring me to this place with surroundings that are utterly abhorrent to me, I would not have married him. I have thought lately more than once that perhaps I mistook the glamour of a girl's fancy for love. I will trouble neither you nor him again. A marriage founded on deceit is no marriage. I married the handsome, simple young artist, one of my own class; I did not marry Lord Ryvers of Ryversdale. You need not employ lawyers on my account I will annul a marriage that is hateful to myself."

"That is nonsense," rejoined the dowager. "You cannot do anything of the kind; you have not the power."

"I will find the power, the way, and the means," said Violet, calmly.

The dowager began to feel just a little bit nervous. It was possible that she was going too far, that her son would be terribly angry. There was no telling what a creature like this, without any of the restraints of class, might do.

"Lady Ryvers," Violet went on, "you have hated me

from the moment I entered your house; you have heaped ridicule and insult on me; now you have crowned all by seeking to rob me of that which is as dear to the poorest peasant as to the highest in the land—my good name. Let me assure you of one thing—you are looking at my face for the last time on earth."

She seemed to hold the elder woman's eyes by the force of her own for some minutes, when slowly, with a gesture of grace, dignity, and sorrow, she left the room. The dowager tried to laugh.

"Quite a tragedy queen!" she said. "What heroics! One would think that she had been on the boards. She seemed to consider that I had committed a crime in trying to rescue my son from a thralldom that will ruin him."

In her heart she knew that it was a crime, for her son was married to this girl in the sight of Heaven, even though some legal quibble might part them according to the laws of men.

It was a crime, and a horrible one. In the depths of her heart she knew that. She felt a little anxious. Not that she feared anything Violet might do or say. It was her son she feared. Had she said too much, gone too far? What did the girl mean by saying that she should never see her face again? She knew that she had given Violet a false impression when she said that her husband knew of the letter. In their angry conversation with regard to the marriage, she had told him that she would write and make inquiries as to whether his marriage was perfectly valid or not. He had answered that she could do so, if she liked, knowing that any inquiries made must be answered favorably and must amply satisfy the inquirer. They had not mentioned the subject since. But the dowager had spoken as if her son had approved of her writing to make those inquiries, and her conscience reproached her for it.

She rang the bell and asked for Lord Ryvers. He had gone out with the Earl of Lester, and they were not expected back until the evening. Randolph had left a message for his mother with Lady Lester. The dowager shrugged her shoulders, and took up her newspaper again. After all, if the girl chose to take what she said in that melodramatic fashion, it was no fault of hers. If the worst happened—if she chose to go and drown herself in the river, or in the mere where the great water-lilies grew—so much the bet-

ter. They could hush the matter up, and her son would be free.

Two hours afterward, when Monica came to the boudoir to ask if Violet were there, her ladyship answered in the most unconcerned fashion. She had been there some time before but the dowager knew nothing of her movements since.

"She must have gone out," said Monica; "I cannot find her in the house. Yet she generally tells me when she goes."

But the dowager made no reply. If her cruel words had driven the girl to madness or death, she gave no sign.

"My dear Monica," she said, languidly, "when you see that I am reading, I think it is very bad taste of you to interrupt me. I know nothing of Violet, and I decline to be tormented about her."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LORD RYVERS returned home that evening light of heart, for he had found, as he thought, a solution of his difficulties. His wife must be his first consideration, her happiness his first care, and, if his mother could not like her, they must dwell apart; he would not have her vexed and annoyed. There was no fear but that Violet was equal to any position in the world. He did not see that association with his mother and sisters was at all needful. To his thinking, Violet was more graceful than they were, and quite as elegant, as refined and well-bred.

Lord Lester had given him a most cordial invitation to Draynham, and Lord Ryvers had accepted it. He was to take his wife and spend some weeks there. By that time the dowager Lady Ryvers would have left Ryversdale, and all would be well.

"Marguerite will like the idea, I hope," said Lord Ryvers.

"If she does not, she will not say so," laughed Lord Lester. "Even in that case she will acquiesce with a graceful, gentle smile; but I am sure she will like it. We will have a nice circle of visitors, and your beautiful young wife will take her place at once. You will find in a very short time that she has the world at her feet."

Lord Ryvers was delighted. As his mother was determ-

ined not to take Violet by the hand, or help her in any way, the next best thing was for the Countess of Lester to do so. He had not thought of that ; but now he saw it was the best thing to be done. There would be no complications, no unpleasantness with his mother. He saw smooth seas and bright skies before him ; the clouds had all disappeared. He was lighter of heart than he had been for some time. He sprung up the steps of the great staircase three at a time, so impatient was he to see Violet, and to tell her that the clouds had broken, and that the brightest of futures lay before them.

But no answer came to his impatient summons. When he stood outside her dressing-room door and called "Violet!" there was no response. When he opened the door and went in, there was no one to be seen. His heart warmed within him as he saw the traces of her graceful presence, the flowers and gloves she had worn, the fan she had used, the book she had been reading. A torn envelope upon the floor. There was no Violet.

He rang the bell. Her maid answered it. He asked where her mistress was, and she replied that her ladyship had gone out at noon and had not returned.

At first he felt no fear, not knowing what had passed during his absence. Still it was strange that she should go out for so long ; but then Violet liked walking.

He went to his dressing-room. His perplexities were soon ended. On his toilet-table, so placed that it must at once catch his eye, was a letter directed to himself in his wife's handwriting.

"Why did she write to me?" he thought. "How strange, when I shall see her at dinner! Perhaps her note is to tell me where she has gone."

He felt no uneasiness as he opened it ; but it was evidently no note, but a closely written letter. What could that mean ? Then there came to him the conviction that there was some terrible sorrow in store for him. He read eagerly, despairingly. Great drops of moisture gathered on his forehead. As he read, a terrible pallor came into his face, a terrible shadow deepened in his eyes. The letter seemed to be half hidden beneath a blood-red mist, and the words at first told no plain story to him.

Then he began to realize what it was. *Violet had gone,*

and gone forever ! She had bidden him her last farewell ; she would never see him again.

" You told me," she wrote, " that I was to try the new life, and, if I did not like it, you would see what was to be done. Always remember, if you had told me what life I had to share with you, I should have declined it. I not only dislike, but I loathe and detest it. I find it perfectly unbearable, and I have renounced it. Neither my education, my training, my character, nor temperament fit me for it. I am not at home in the midst of the splendor and luxury of Ryversdale, less at home than a wild forest-bird would be in a gilded cage. My dislike to the life, the scorn and insults of those near to you, the unkindness with which I have been treated, the perfect unhappiness of my life, the sense that I have of having been deceived—I would have borne all for your sake ; but that has happened which I cannot and will not bear. Your mother has written to an eminent firm of lawyers in London, instructing them to find out whether there is any flaw or informality in our marriage. So great is her desire to part us that she has taken counsel's opinion as to whether the fact of your being married under age is not sufficient to annul our marriage. By mistake the letter written by the firm in reply to hers fell into my hands. I took it to her. She made no disguise at all of the part she had played in the matter. She told me that she would give half her fortune to see the marriage annulled. They were hard and pitiless words to hear ; but I felt they were true : my place is not here. That was the crowning insult which I cannot bear ; and the crowning sorrow is this—that you knew your mother intended writing and acquiesced in it.

" That fact parts us. Never willingly will I look upon your face again, never will I bear your name, never will I live under your roof. I will never see your mother, never speak to her, never enter the same house with her. She is dead to me in this life, as I am dead to her. She has sought to annul our marriage ; I annul it myself ; I leave you forever. If, when I am gone, you find the law can help you legally to free yourself and legally to marry another, my prayer is that you may speedily do so.

" Do not make any attempt at searching for me ; I shall never return. If there were any power to compel me, I would rather die than yield to that power. Remember that death in any shape would be preferable to returning. Your love, your kindness to me I shall always remember ; but the whole proceeding from beginning to end has been a most fatal mistake. You deceived me, you took me into a life for which I am unfit, and the end has come, as the end comes inevitably to everything not founded in truth and honor. I bid you an everlasting farewell, Randolph, and I hope that you will be so far able to rectify your mistake as to prevent your life from being spoiled. I sign myself your lost

VIOLET."

That was all. There was no loving word to soften the blow, no regret, no sorrow at leaving him, no word of the

love that had once been between them—nothing but offended pride, wounded dignity, outraged prejudices—no love.

For a few minutes he was haunted by a vision of Violet as he had first seen her on the morning when “June’s palace was paved with gold ;” then by one of Violet as she had stood with the love-light on her face and the scarlet flowers on her breast. The terrible present died for a time ; it seemed to elude him ; he could neither grasp nor realize it. He was in St. Byno’s woods, with the girl he worshipped by his side, and they were talking of love that would never die ; he was in the old church at St. Byno’s, and Violet, with a small, soft hand in his, was saying, “Till death us do part ;” he was with her on the Rhine, where she was giving him pretty wise lectures about not spending so much money ; he was with her again when she upbraided and denounced him, then kissed him with tears, and promised to try to live the life that pleased him. And now it was all ended. She was gone, and according to her own words, she had bidden him an eternal farewell.

Her beautiful face was before him—the violet eyes, the golden hair, the delicate brows, so clearly marked, the lovely lines and gracious curves of the sweetest mouth that woman ever had. Every charm that she possessed rose before him—the graceful carriage of the proud head, the graceful gestures and movements, the gentle touch of the white hand.

Gone ! What nonsense ! It was an evil dream that he must shake off. Here was the waning yellow light of a November evening—just the time for a terrible dream, for horrible fancies ; he must shake them off. Surely in the distance he could hear his darling’s voice ?

“An eternal farewell !” Good Heaven, what horrible words ! They seemed to come to him from the depths of some dark abyss. She was his on earth, and she should be his in heaven. Love—above all, love sanctified by marriage—could never die.

“She annulled the marriage herself, poor child,” he murmured. Yet had he not heard her repeatedly denounce the present law of divorce ? “And she thinks that by this one act of hers she can free herself from me. She is mine through all time and eternity, in virtue of the vows

that made her so. She is mine in this world and in the next!"

But where was she? No beautiful face shone in the empty rooms; no sweet and gracious presence brought happiness to him. Where was she? And, when he asked himself the question, a terrible sense of desolation came over him.

These dreadful words could not be true. If they were, he must have been mistaken; she could not have loved him as he loved her. He remembered that he had a foreboding of this many times. Love bears with anything, love never complains. If she had loved him with all her heart, she would have borne with his mother's pride and temper; but she did not, she could not, and the November shadows fell around him, leaving him despairing and heartbroken.

At first it seemed to him that he should never move from the chair on which he was seated, that he should never quit his room, that life was all ended, that the darkness and coldness of death were gathering round him.

Strong men do not often weep. A sweet singer says:

"Talk not of tears till thou hast seen
The tears of warlike men."

Any one seeing the young lord's head bent low and the tears that rained down his handsome face would have had some idea of what he suffered, would have had some idea of how he loved his wife.

CHAPTER XL.

HE must face it—this horrible trouble of his! As for going in search of her, of course he should do it; but it would be quite useless. Even if he found her, she had told him that death was preferable to returning home. It was useless to stay there in his room; he must go out and face his trouble; but for the dreaming, poetical, artistic soul the brightness of life was ended.

He read the letter again, and this time he saw in its true light the conduct of his mother. She had no right to have written such letters at all; she had no right to have written without specially mentioning the fact to him. Having written, she had been criminally careless in allowing the answer to her letters to fall into Violet's hands. She had

also evidently misrepresented to Violet what he had said on the subject.

How cruel his mother had been to his beautiful young wife! Instead of making her welcome, adopting her as her daughter, cherishing and caring for her, she had insulted her so greatly that the girl preferred death to remaining with her.

Hot anger and indignation filled his heart. He went at once in search of his mother; he must learn what she had done, how she had driven his young wife away and destroyed his happiness.

He found the dowager alone in the drawing-room. The proud and stately lady looked up at her son's entrance, and her high courage, her proud worldly spirit gave way a little when she saw the expression of his face. Had she gone too far?

Lord Ryvers walked up to her and laid the letter before her. She had seen nothing like his white, set face and his flashing eyes before.

"Will you read that and tell me if it be true?" he said.

She took it from him without a word, and she read it steadily from beginning to end. If her nerves were giving way, he should not know it. He had expected to see fear, regret, remorse in her face; but she merely smiled, and his anger grew to a white heat when he saw the smile.

"She annul the marriage! I wish to Heaven she could!" was her comment. "Randolph, I cannot imagine why you married that girl; I am sure she never loved you."

"I loved her enough to make up for any deficiencies on her part," he replied. "Is that letter true?"

"It is true, inasmuch as I wrote to the lawyers and by some absurd mistake the answer was carried to her. You knew that I should write: I told you so."

"Yes, but not in that fashion. I thought you intended to make certain that my marriage was without a flaw. Do you believe that I am so little worth the name of man as to think lightly of a woman's honor? My wife is all the world to me; my love, my care, my interests begin and end with her. You have made the most fatal mistake of your life, mother. If you had welcomed her here, if you had been kind, gentle, and affectionate, you would have won my

eternal gratitude ; as it is, you have my eternal reproach. You might have helped me to be the happiest man in the world, and you have gone out of your way to make me the most miserable. Do you think anything on earth could make me love Violet less—could separate me from her ? ”

“ She has not shown much desire to remain with you ; she has been quick enough to avail herself of an excuse to leave you.”

“ That is your fault,” he replied. “ Reproaches are all in vain, but some are due to you. I do not wish to remind you that perhaps no mother has had her own way more entirely than you have. I have been a good son to you ; I have complied with every wish of yours. My lands and revenues have been yours ; you have done as you would. My house has been yours, and your presence was always most welcome. Whenever you have expressed a wish to me, I have hastened to carry it out. And this is my reward—you have driven my wife from me.”

“ I repeat that she seemed very willing to go,” said her ladyship. “ She has taken the first pretext offered to her. No man ought to marry out of his own sphere ; it is a mistake that must be rectified sooner or later. I grieve that your life is laid waste by that proud, willful, plebeian girl.”

He looked at her steadily.

“ You have said your say, mother ; hear mine. You have driven my wife away from me. I will go to, and I will not look upon your face again until I have found her.”

The proud face paled a little, and an odd, wistful look came into the fine eyes.

“ I will not believe,” said her ladyship, haughtily, “ that the love of any woman can part my son from me.”

“ You have made me desperate ; you have driven me mad. You have robbed my life of all that was best and brightest in it ; you have taken from me my chief treasure, you can do what you will with the rest. I will never return to Ryversdale, I will never look upon your face again, until I have found my wife ; and, if I never find her, this is our eternal farewell.”

She rose with a troubled face. She could not part so with the son whom she loved better than her life.

“ Randolph,” she said, hurriedly, “ you must think better of this ; you must not leave me in this fashion.”

“ I could not stay ; I could never look on you again,

mother, knowing what you have done to my wife. I shall leave now, at once, and you may do as you will with Ryversdale. I could not stay where I have been accustomed to see her; it would wear my heart away. Make what excuse you will, say what you will, the whole truth, if you like—it will be best, far best—neither home, sisters, nor mother will I see again until I have found my wife. Tell them so for me."

The proud figure trembled, the proud face quivered.

"Randolph," she cried, imperiously, "I forbid you to go! You owe me the respect and obedience due from a son to his mother, and by it I command you to stay here."

"You have failed in your duties, mother; you must forgive me if, in my turn, I fail in mine."

She drew one step nearer to him.

"Randolph," she said, almost imploringly for one so proud—"Randolph, if you are leaving me, kiss me before you go."

He looked at the proud face softening for him.

"I cannot," he replied, abruptly, "I cannot. I feel as though you had murdered my wife."

And after that she said no more. He left the room, and it seemed to her that the best part of her life went with him. Not that she hated Violet less, but that she loved her son more. They had been so loving, so devoted to each other. She had always thought there was no such son, he that there was no such mother; and now this girl with the beautiful face and proud willful eyes had come between them.

"He will not go," she said to herself. "He, who has never been cool to me in his life, will not leave me so."

She sat still for many hours; her pride was too great to allow her to go in search of him, to plead or remonstrate with him—besides which, she had an idea that it would be quite useless. She sat still, her heart, proud as she was, torn with different passions—love for her son, regret at losing him, and hatred against the girl who had come between them. Once she thought she heard his footsteps in the corridor that led to her room. Her heart beat fast. He was coming back to her, this idol of her heart—coming back to say that he could not leave her, that the new love might go, but the old must remain. But the footsteps passed on, and the dream lasted but a moment. Some

hours afterward she heard the sound of a carriage driven rapidly from the house ; and then she knew that her son was gone, and she wondered vaguely when she should see his face again.

" My children have not proved an unmixed blessing," she said to herself. " Marguerite has done the best, and naturally she is the happiest. Monica would drive any mother to despair ; but I shall bend her will to mine yet. My son, the love of my heart, the pride of my life—he has made the greatest mistake of all."

She did not like her task of telling the others what had happened. Lord Lester, she knew, would be vexed, for he had always seemed greatly interested in Violet, and much attached to her ; Marguerite would smile serenely, and no one would know whether she felt glad or sorry ; while Monica, who loved her brother's wife, would give way to a storm of tears.

She did not like the task ; still there was no alternative ; and, when the twilight fell, she sent for the three to her room. Monica came first, all wonder, the fair and gracious Countess of Lester next, without any wonder at all, and Lord Lester, feeling somewhat impatient lest dinner should be delayed, entered last.

" Your mother is rather too much of a Semiramis, my dear," he said to his wife, as they obeyed the somewhat imperious summons. " She seems to think the world has been made for her."

" It might have been made for a worse person," said the Countess, serenely. " Some women are queens by nature, and some by right divine. Mamma is a queen by nature."

" She is an autocrat," returned Lord Lester ; " and why we are sent for like three children I cannot imagine. It seems to me—and I feel sure I am right—that there is something wrong with regard to Randolph and Violet. If it be so, I shall take Violet's side, and no other."

When Lord Lester saw the dowager, he knew that they had not been sent for from any caprice or whim ; there was an expression on her ladyship's proud face which he had never seen there before.

" Will you close the door ? " said the dowager. " I wish to speak to you all before we meet at dinner. You know how much I dislike any *esclandre* before the servants. I have to tell you that the girl with whom my son is so un-

fortunately infatuated left Ryversdale this morning, avowing her intention of never returning. A letter intended for me was, by the stupidity of a servant, given to her. She read it, and, taking umbrage at it, went away. I may as well tell you frankly that I had written to ask if it were possible to find any flaw in Randolph's marriage, as the one great desire of my heart is to have it annulled."

There was a muttered sound from Lord Lester, a passionate burst of tears from Monica, but, from the expression on Lady Lester's face, it was impossible to tell whether she was pleased or not.

"I take upon myself the whole responsibility of having written that letter," said Lady Ryvers. "She went away, leaving a letter for Randolph, telling him that she had annulled the marriage herself, and should never see him again. He, in his turn, came to upbraid me, to tell me that he should leave Ryversdale, that I could do with it what I would, and that, until he had found his wife, he would never look upon the face of his mother or sisters again. As I do not wish this scandal to reach the servants, you will please to speak of their departure as of an event for which we were all prepared."

And, without another word, without giving any one time to form a reply, the dowager, holding her head very erect, quitted the room, leaving them to digest the news as best they could.

CHAPTER XLI.

LORD RYVERS did not long continue his search for his wife; he knew it was useless. If Violet had left him of her own free will, and while laboring under a great mistake, he could not force her back. He was bitterly pained, sorely hurt, sorely wounded. He had loved her so well; he had dowered her so royally with all that belonged to him; and now she valued it all so little that she had left him forever. There were times when he thought that, even should she return and ask his pardon, he would not forgive her for having deserted him. She could never have really loved him, or her love had died when she learned that he was not an artist, but a lord. It seemed to him absurdly foolish, all such class hatred. Why should Violet dislike

him when she found he was rich and powerful? He had not disliked her for being poor and unknown.

"Love levels everything," he said to himself, "and she can never have loved me."

He was wretched beyond words; his art no longer interested him. "The Queen of the Rhine," the picture which he had painted with such love and such skill, hung in the great empty house in London; and when he looked at it his very heart seemed torn with pain.

He had decided to remain for some time at least in London. He would try to interest himself in his art; he would seek the society of artists, good, warm-hearted fellows who would never ask if he were married or single, and, if they thought he had a trouble, would carefully abstain from alluding to it. In London it was more than possible he might hear of Violet—far more possible even than if he went abroad or lived in the country.

Before settling down in the great city, Lord Ryvers went to see Miss Atherton at St. Byno's and learn if any trace of his wife was to be discovered there. The anger, the indignation, the bitter reproaches of that irate lady almost overwhelmed him. At first she was speechless with fury; then she broke out into a perfect tempest of rage.

"I never trusted you," she said. "I felt sure that you were playing us false in some way or other; but I never dreamed it was so bad as this. If I had known the truth, you should never have married Violet. I would rather have laid her in her grave than have given her to you."

"I have made her a good husband," returned Lord Ryvers, calmly.

"You have taken a dove to a hawk's nest, and she has flown from it to escape rending!" cried Miss Atherton. "An aristocrat means a wolf in sheep's clothing. Were there not girls and women enough in your own sphere that you must come prowling about here, deceiving those who never wronged you? No; Violet has not returned to me. And, if she does, I will keep her; you shall never see her again. I warned her. I could be sorry for her but that my anger against her is so great. If you had been my lover, I should have found out what you were; you would not have hoodwinked me. I knew she would find thorns in her orange-blossoms, poor foolish child!"

The young lord had not much comfort or consolation in

his marriage, the marriage which he had made all for love. He tried to induce Miss Atherton to promise that, if Violet went there, she would write to him : but she sternly refused to do anything of the kind.

"I shall do all I can," she cried, "to keep her from you. The wisest thing she has done since she knew you has been to leave you. Those who trust to a man trust to a broken reed. I leaned on such a reed for many years , it broke as I leaned, and pierced my heart."

That was the first reference Miss Atherton had ever made to her trouble in his presence, and it touched him greatly. She was hard and cold as marble. He could not soften her ; she was implacable.

"If you had been a forger and a thief," she declared, "I should have liked you better than I do. An aristocrat injured me, blighted my life, broke my heart, and I have sworn undying hatred to the race. I shall be best pleased when you are gone."

He looked at her with a sad smile on his handsome face.

" You disliked me altogether at first," he said. " However, you forgave me for being an artist. Will you never forgive me for being an aristocrat ? "

" No, never," she replied, firmly.

And he knew that she would keep her word. Miss Atherton was true to her principles. Had he come back to her in poverty, a poor struggling artist, she would have shared her best with him; to an aristocrat she would extend no hospitality. She did not ask him to take either a cupful of milk or a glass of water. She showed such bitter, inveterate hatred of his class, such dislike to himself, that it was a relief to get away from the cottage.

His heart ached as his eyes fell on the well-remembered scenes, on the grand old woods of St. Byno's, on the garden where Violet had stood before him in the moonlight. Where was she who had beautified and gladdened it, who had been as the bright sunlight to this fair landscape, and without whom it was dark as night ? What a miserable end it was to his love and his marriage, he who had thought to secure greater happiness than had ever been granted to man before !

He went back to London with Miss Atherton's violent denunciations lingering in his ears. He felt altogether numbled ; yet, in spite of his bitter sorrow, he did smile

one when he thought of what would happen if his mother and Miss Atherton were to meet. He tried to engross himself in his work. Once or twice he thought of employing a private detective to trace Violet; but then he replied to his own thoughts, in despair, "If she were found, what would it matter?" Nothing mattered but that she should come to him of her own accord. And for that the young lord, to whom had been given the artist's genius and the poet's soul, waited day after day with patience, never ashamed to pray that the same Heaven which had once given his wife to him would restore her now that she was lost.

* * * * *

Upon what varied scenes did the sun now shine! At Ryversdale on a proud, haughty woman, whose pride grew deeper and whose heart grew colder every day; on a bright, loving girl who was losing health, strength, and youth, pining for her lover; at Draynham, where the Earl of Lester raged against his mother-in-law as the most proud and the most cruel of women, and where the beautiful Countess listened with a calm smile to all the fulminations of her lord; over the great house in London, where the young husband spent his solitary days.

A strange event had happened. Violet had left Ryversdale, her heart on fire with indignation, full of anger against her husband. She was not just to him. All that had happened seemed to be his fault—seemed to have sprung from the one source, his deception. The shame seemed to her greater than she could bear, that any one should dare call the validity of her marriage into question.

"If I had been an earl's daughter or a great heiress, Lady Rivers would have been anxious to make my marriage secure."

What angry scorn, what bitter contempt filled her heart! Ah, well might the masses hate the aristocrats! Well might they rise in the olden days and slay them! What right had they to assume such superiority? In what had these two women—the Countess of Lester and Lady Ryvers—a superiority over her? It was the first time that she had been brought into contact with those whom she had been trained to hate, and she did full justice to her training.

Bitter, angry thoughts filled her mind. She did not think much of herself, of whither she was going, of what she would do : she was too angry. Never again, she vowed to herself, would she look upon the faces of those she had left. She would annul her marriage by going far away. Never would she submit again to the insolent pride of Lady Ryvers ; never again would she look into the face of the man who had brought all these troubles upon her.

She had left behind her all the rich paraphernalia of dress, jewels, and ornaments that her husband had lavished upon her ; not one of them would she touch. She dressed herself plainly, and she left the grand old mansion on foot, heedless enough as to whither she was going.

If it had occurred to her that the money in her purse was her husband's, she would have let that behind her also ; but she forgot all about it. She had some vague idea of going back to St. Byno's. Miss Atherton's wrath would be hard to bear, but it would not be so hard as Lady Ryvers' insolence. Of all that she was giving up she never thought ; the luxury and magnificence had grown hateful to her, because they were accompanied by insolence and unkindness. Perhaps, had she met with kindness and affection instead of cruelty, she might have enjoyed the splendor of Ryversdale ; as it was, she never gave it a thought ; she was hurrying from all that she hated, angry and indignant, scornful and contemptuous.

When she reached the station, the London train was just starting. She had no object in going to London ; to get away quickly, to leave Ryversdale, with all its associations, was her prevailing idea.

She took a ticket for London. Her heart had not ceased its angry beating, every pulse was thrilling with the memory of the insult she had received.

The train stopped at London Bridge. The accidental taking of that ticket was to be the very turning-point of her life. She owned afterward that it was strange. If the train had happened to be going to Liverpool or Glasgow, she would have taken a ticket quite as readily to either.

The train stopped at London Bridge, and the first person she saw, as she left the carriage, was Mrs. Carstone. Immeasurable was that lady's delight, while to Violet it seemed as though the clouds had suddenly opened and a gleam of light appeared in the darkness.

Perhaps, had Violet been less hotly indignant, she might have thought twice before she poured out her list of grievances to Mrs. Carstone. She was too angry to think.

"I have left them forever," she declared. "I wish never to see them again."

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Carstone, perplexed, "it does not seem to me that your husband is to blame!"

"He alone is to blame," she replied. "He should have told me the truth, and then left me to please myself when I knew it. I shall annul my own marriage."

"You cannot do that," said Mrs. Carstone, with a smile at the girl's simplicity.

"I can do it just as well as any one else," she replied.

"My dear, you had better go home with me," Mrs. Carstone said, quite suddenly. "My husband and son have gone to Italy again; I did not care to accompany them on this occasion. Come home with me for a time; I am all alone."

And Violet went, little foreseeing all that was to arise from that invitation, or the great events that were to spring from so slight a cause.

CHAPTER XLII.

"Look," said Violet—and she held out a thin, white hand to Mrs. Carstone—"you see I have done it myself. If a judge and jury, or whoever tries such cases, can say that I am not married, I can say so myself."

The hand she held out had no wedding-ring on it. She had removed it, and seemed to consider that she had by that means in some degree released herself.

"My dear Violet," said the kindly mistress of Ingleshaw, "how foolish you are! Nothing so trifling can undo a marriage."

"I used to think so," replied Violet; "but, if Lady Ryvers, with lawyers and Queen's Counsel, can manage it, why should not I?"

"I wish you would think differently of your husband," said Mrs. Carstone. "I do not wonder that you should be very angry with the dowager Lady Ryvers; but I see no cause for anger against her son."

On every point visitor and hostess agreed, except this one. Mrs. Carstone admired Lord Ryvers very much, and

could not see that he had done wrong. Against his mother, for acting what she felt to be a cruel part, she was most indignant; the young husband, who seemed to adore his beautiful wife, was blameless in her eyes.

It was a happy accident by which Violet had met Mrs. Carstone.

"Where should you have gone and what should you have done," asked Mrs. Carstone, "if we had not met?"

"I cannot tell," she replied. "I am thankful to Heaven that I met you, Mrs. Carstone; I could not have found a kinder friend."

"I should never rest," declared the elder lady, "until we are friends again with that handsome young husband of yours. I shall never forget the way in which he watched you always."

"He has looked his last on me," said Violet.

She had refused to be called "Lady Ryvers"; she would not hear the name.

"My husband's mother wished to deprive me of it," she said scornfully; "I will give it up now of my own free will. I will be Violet Beaton for the rest of my life."

"You are very willful, Violet," remarked Mrs. Carstone, "and some day you will be most surely sorry for the way in which you have given up your husband."

The mistress of Ingleshaw was much amused when she saw how untiring Violet pored over the newspapers. She, who had barely heard the word "divorce," now read most of the divorce reports which appeared in the newspapers; but amongst them all there was no dispute between husband and wife like her own.

Those days at Ingleshaw were not altogether unpleasant.

"How little I dreamed," said Violet to Mrs. Carstone one morning, "that I should ever seek a refuge with you; How we talked about Ingleshaw! How I wondered where you would find room for all the things Mr. Carstone and Mr. Oscar bought! Now they do not seem so many, because your place is so large."

Mrs. Carstone was very proud of her beautiful home. It was strange that Violet, who had so deeply resented the dowager Lady Ryvers' pride in Ryversdale, never grew angry with her hostess. She had declined with haughty pride to examine the family treasures at Ryversdale. She did not care to see the silver goblet from which Queen

Elizabeth had drunk. She did not care for the old silver candlestick used by Marie Stuart. She would not even look at an old missal that had belonged to the Merrie Monarch. These things had no value in her eyes ; but when Mrs. Carstone took her to see the various treasures of Ingleshaw, she was delighted with them—she, who had been so impatient with the pride and hauteur of Lady Ryvers, simply laughed at the pride of Mrs. Carstone.

The days passed pleasantly because she could forget all about Ryversdale. Mrs. Carstone was an excellent hostess ; her one idea was to make Violet happy. No one knew her ; she was always addressed as Miss Beaton. She was much beloved by all the household ; her beautiful face won their hearts. Her manner was so kind and gentle ; they wished madam had such a daughter ; they wished their young master would bring home such a wife.

While the hot resentment and anger burned in Violet's heart, no softening thought of her husband came to her—she did not miss his love, his caresses, his attentions ; but, after a time, she grew restless—nothing more than that—restless in body and mind. She could not remain long in one place. She wandered from room to room, from house to grounds ; from field to forest ; she wandered on the terraces, in the picture-galleries ; there was never any peace or rest on her beautiful face. It was the same with all her employments. If she sat down to the piano, she rose in a few minutes to find a book ; if she took a volume, and Mrs. Carstone thought she was going to read, the book would be laid down or exchanged for something else.

"Is it her heart or her conscience ?" the kindly lady asked herself. She could not possibly think she had done right ; yet she seemed to be upheld by some lofty sense of pride.

"Do you never think about your husband ?" Mrs. Carstone asked her one night.

"Yes, of course I do," she replied.

"Do you miss him ?" her friend pursued.

"I do not wish to speak about him," Violet answered, quietly.

"He must be very unhappy," said Mrs. Carstone ; "he loved you so dearly. And he does not even know where you are. He must be in great suspense and distress."

"I wish," cried Violet, impatiently, "you would not talk

about him ! Do let me forget him ; you give me no chance. You mean most kindly, I know, but it irritates me."

" Because, my dear," said Mrs. Carstone, with great complacency, " your conscience is not at ease."

When she was alone Violet began to reflect on those words. Was Randolph miserable ? Was he in suspense ? Was he always thinking of her and wondering where she was ? Something seemed to rise in her heart and plead for him, but she would not listen to it. What if he had loved her with a love passing the love of man ? What if he had been willing to give up the whole world for her ? What if he had surrounded her with loving care and sweet observances ? In her anger against him she would not remember these things. He had deceived her, and he had brought the great shame of life upon her.

She hardened her heart against him ; she would not remember his care and his love. He had forfeited all right to her affection. She did not understand enough of human nature to be quite sure that the very pique of her anger must have had its source in love.

Nothing would have pleased Mrs. Carstone better than to keep Violet with her always ; but when they had spent three weeks together, a letter came announcing the return in a few weeks of the two gentlemen of the house. Then Violet seemed to realize her position, and she shrunk from meeting them.

" I cannot stay here when they are at home," she said ; " I should not like it. Dear Mrs. Carstone, teach me what to do ; I must work for myself."

And she was deaf to any other suggestion. In vain did Mrs. Carstone implore her to stay at Ingleshaw, assuring her that both her husband and son would be delighted.

" I know it," she replied. " They would be pleased ; they would be kind, as you are ; but I should prefer to leave here. My husband was just the least in the world jealous of Mr. Oscar, and he would not like it."

" But you have given him up," said Mrs. Carstone ; " you have made up your mind never to see him again."

" Still I should not like to do anything of which he would not approve," answered Violet, earnestly—so earnestly that Mrs. Carstone smiled to herself, and felt more hopeful of a reconciliation than she had yet. " I must work for myself," the girl continued. " I should have been compelled to do

so if I had not met my husband. There is no great hardship in doing it now."

"Perhaps Lord Ryvers may not like it," said Mrs. Carstone. "To my mind, that seems much worse than living with us."

"He worked himself—worked hard at painting!" she replied. "I must do something. Even if I could, I would not live on your charity, Mrs. Carstone."

"You should not, my dear. If you will remain with me as my companion, I will pay you just the same as any one else, neither more nor less, and I will be very kind to you."

"I know that; but it would not do. I am quite sure that if ever it came to my husband's knowledge, he would not approve of it. Help me in another fashion, dear Mrs. Carstone. Try to find a situation for me. I could not teach—I do not know enough; but I should make a good companion. Will you use your influence to find me such a situation as that?"

"Do you really mean it?" asked Mrs. Carstone, looking at her.

"I do indeed," Violet assured her.

"Then you may consider the situation as already secured, for Mrs. Beresford, who called here yesterday, told me that she had been asked by a friend of hers, who has been a companion and who is giving up the situation, to find a successor."

"What a strange thing!" said Violet, never guessing that it was the pointing of the finger of Fate.

CHAPTER XLIII.

VIOLET had little difficulty in obtaining the situation to which Mrs. Carstone had referred. Mrs. Beresford made all the necessary arrangements for her, and it was settled that she was to go to Queen's Elm in the following week. She had resumed her maiden name; she would not hide under any *alias*. Just as she had taken off her wedding-ring and placed it away, so now she laid aside the name that she disliked and resumed that of her parents.

The dowager and her children wanted to annul her marriage, and they should be gratified; she would annul it herself. Deep down in her heart lay the firm conviction that no human power could undo a marriage, that it could be

dissolved only by death ; but, if the dowager and her children liked to speak of marriage as though it were a ceremony to be set aside at will and pleasure, let them. She would adopt the same view, and so free herself.

Mrs. Carstone listened, as she did to everything Violet said, with a smile. She made no further attempt to argue, to remonstrate, or interfere. She had begun to realize that time was the only thing which would bring matters right, and in silence she agreed to all Violet's whims. She said nothing about the wedding-ring that lay in the drawer up stairs. Dearly as she delighted to speak of a grand acquaintance, she carefully refrained from mentioning the fact that the young Lady Ryvers of Ryversdale was staying with her. She did all she could to further Violet's views and intentions. She told her to make what use she would of her name, that she would be only too pleased to be a reference for her.

"But you will soon tire of the position you have chosen to fill," she said. "A few months will show you how different it is from that which you have hitherto occupied, and you will be ready to forgive even the dowager Lady Ryvers by that time."

"I will never forgive her while I live," said Violet, passionately ; "and I would rather die of hunger than go back to her."

"Nevertheless you are going amongst aristocrats again," remarked Mrs. Carstone, quietly.

Violet looked slightly perplexed.

"It will not be forever," she said. "I shall work my way back to my own class in time."

The situation promised well. Violet was to act as companion to an elderly lady, Mrs. Ingram, of Queen's Elm, who had long lost her husband, and wanted some one to be constantly with her. She had neither sons nor daughters living, only one grandchild. Of this grandchild Mrs. Beresford knew nothing, except that she was very beautiful, and would be a great heiress, as all the accumulated wealth of the Ingram family would be hers.

The granddaughter, heiress and beauty though she was, did not enter much into Violet's calculations ; she did not spend much time at Queen's Elm, and would have nothing to do with her. Insensibly she grew interested in Mrs. Beresford's account of Queen's Elm, one of the oldest ma-

ctorial houses in the land, and which took its name from the fact of its having once been the residence of Queen Philippa of Hainault.

There was a lovely alley called Queen Philippa's walk, a grand old oaken room with quaint tapestry called Queen Philippa's chamber; and the long magnificent row of elms, some of which the royal hands were supposed to have planted, was called the Queen's Grove.

From the number of elms about it the place had taken its name. They also gave the name to the pretty county town of Elm Green, which lay at a distance of five miles from the old manor-house. The scenery was very beautiful; there were deep streams, green hills crowned with trees, fertile meadows, and fruit-laden orchards.

It was the end of September when Violet reached Queen's Elm. She had been fiercely independent up to the very last. She had refused any assistance from Mrs. Carstone; she refused any escort, laughed at the idea, and seemed to take the keenest delight in ignoring every aristocratic tradition.

Mrs. Carstone had long since ceased all remonstrance; she saw sufficiently clearly into Violet's character to be quite sure that neither opposition nor contradiction would be of any use.

The only thing was to let her take her own way—and that Violet did. She reached Queen's Elm on a fine September evening, when the old place was all aglow in the sunset, and as her eyes fell on it she wondered if, after all, there was not some merit in antiquity. Surely nothing could be more lovely than the fine old house, the gray stone almost covered with ivy, the growth of centuries. It was worth a whole mile of modern palaces all gilding and stucco; no money, no art could impart that air of antiquity. And, in spite of herself, in spite of all the ideas that had been instilled into her, she found herself wondering whether it were the same thing with men as with houses—whether there was as much difference between an aristocrat and a *parvenu* as between an old house, the home of many centuries and one built in the most modern style. And there came to her mind, as the thought occurred to her, the recollection of two men, perfect types of each—Oscar Carstone the *parvenu*, the son of the "self-made man," with the outward polish and manner of a gentleman, and

her husband, Lord Ryvers, with innate nobility in every thought and word.

For the first time in her life she paused to think if it were possible that the training of Aunt Alice could have been a wrong or mistaken one. Then the memory of all she had suffered at Ryversdale came to her, and once more her heart burned with hatred toward the class she had been taught to despise.

When Violet arrived at Queen's Elm, she was ushered at once into the presence of Mrs. Ingram. She found her very old and feeble, but dignified and slightly haughty in manner. She was sitting in a large, old-fashioned drawing-room, dressed in a thick, rich black brocade, with point-lace at her throat and round her wrists, her gray hair covered with a cap of the same material. All over the house, but especially in this room, was the faint sweet odor of dried rose-leaves.

Mrs. Ingram looked up when Violet entered. She seemed to bring with her an atmosphere of youth, grace, and beauty.

"You are my new companion," she said, in a sweet old voice that had in it a far-off ring and must once have been like music itself. "I am very glad to see you."

She seemed surprised at the fair beauty of Violet's face, and she looked at her intently.

"You are not much like the usual type of companions," she said gently. "I have had so many."

A weary little sigh followed the words, and Violet's heart was touched.

"I have had so many," repeated the old lady; "and none of them stay long. When the natural companions of one's life are gone, all seems gone. I have lost husband and children. The only relative I have left is one grandchild—one beautiful grandchild. Ah, my dear, what companions could fill the place of those I have lost?"

"None," answered Violet; "but I will do my best."

"Thank you, my dear," she replied. "I think—I am sure you will please me. You have a sweet voice and a beautiful face; but you are young and hopeful. This life will be dull for you."

Violet's fair face shadowed as she remembered what life had done for her.

"I do not like what people call life," she answered. "I shall be best content here with you."

It seemed like a haven of rest, this grand old house with its surroundings, its old-fashioned magnificence, and its faint odor of dried rose-leaves. Violet looked at the mistress of the place.

"I had better tell you frankly," she said, "that I have never been out as companion before, and that I am quite ignorant of the duties of one. If you will but tell me what to do, I will try my best to do it."

"I can sum up the duties of a companion in very few words," said Mrs. Ingram. "Have you a mother living?"

"No," replied Violet.

"Try to imagine what it would be if you had; and what you would do for your mother do for me."

"I will try," said Violet, gently.

"If I am cross or irritable—and old age is full of crotchets—bear with me; if I am ill, be kind to me. I live in a world of shadows. My lost husband and my lost children are always with me; do not startle me suddenly from my dreams. The most merciful part of my life now is my dreams. I want you," she continued, "not to be always with me, but always near me. I do not rise until late, so that the morning hours will be all your own; my maid attends to me then; but when I am down stairs, I shall wish you to read to me, to walk out in the grounds with me, to drive out with me, to receive visitors for me, to answer my letters. You will find plenty of employment, and I hope you will be happy."

That evening, when Violet had retired to her room and the mantle of night and silence had fallen over the house, she felt a vague longing—for what she was hardly conscious. She was young, every pulse beating with the full tide of youth and life; she felt shut out of the world. This quiet house amongst the trees did not seem to be part of the world she had lived in.

It was barely nine o'clock, and yet every light was out except hers, every one asleep but herself. The moon was shining brightly. From the great windows of her room she could see the park and the trees, and the brook that ran its winding course. She could see the lovely alley called the Queen's Walk; the moon shone full upon it, silvering

the great trunks of the trees and throwing weird shadows on the grass.

A queen had walked up and down there, watching the moon perhaps with sad, passionate eyes, watching the sun with longing too great for words. How many hundred years back was it since she did so, and what was Philippa of Hainault like? Had her heart burned, like the hearts of other women, with love? Had it been torn, like the hearts of other women, with jealousy?

"Oh, dead queen," asked Violet, "did you suffer as I have suffered?"

But the white moonlight lay where Philippa of Hainault had walked, and the trees told no secrets.

What was her husband doing on this moonlit night? Then, looking at the hand which bore no wedding-ring, she said to herself that she had no husband, yet fell asleep to dream of her artist-lover as she had seen him first in the woods of St. Byno's.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THREE weeks had passed since Violet came to Queen's Elm. The stately spirit of the place seemed in some measure to have entered into her. There was a dignified precision about everything which was new to her. All was so old; there was almost sacrilege in the thought of anything modern. The servants were old, and had grown gray in the service of the family; they were servants of the old-fashioned type, full of respect and reverence for their superiors, proud enough of the state of life to which they had been called, proud of being good servants and serving good people; there was no absurd aping of their betters, but a quiet reliance on themselves and their own claims to consideration.

Everything was so old, with such an out-of-the-world glamour, that Violet's youth and Violet's beauty seemed almost out of place. Nevertheless she was soon beloved and worshiped by the whole household. They told her that her face was like sunshine; and they waited upon her as though she had been a queen.

"Thank Heaven," said the mistress of Queen's Elm to her one day, "that you are a lady, my dear."

Violet started at the words, much as though she had received a blow in the face. Mrs. Ingram went on :

" No one knows what it is to live on intimate terms with a person who is not a lady. I have suffered much from it. Of course, all those who have been with me have had a certain amount of polish ; but in many cases it has been like the veneer on common wood."

" I am not a lady by birth," stammered Violet. " My father was only a poor doctor ; my aunt, who brought me up, had very little to live upon ; she was only a governess."

" Pardon me," said the old lady, with a smile, " you are a lady ; you have refined thoughts, your ideas are all beautiful, dainty, and fanciful ; you have principle, you have courage ; you can enter into the thoughts, the hearts, the lives of others ; you are sensitive to the very tip of your pretty fingers, my dear ; you never jar upon one in any fashion. I say that you are a lady."

" Now why," thought Violet, " should she judge me so differently from Lady Ryvers, who called me vulgar and ill-bred ? "

" I have an idea," said Mrs. Ingram, impressively, " that, after all, the truest aristocracy is that of nature. The world has divided men into different classes ; but nature has done the same thing, and in a far more startling manner. Men are not equal in fortune ; they are still more unequal in gifts of body and mind. To my thinking, the noble by nature surpass the noble by birth ; the two combined should produce perfection. I repeat that I thank Heaven that you are a lady, that your ideas are all beautiful, dainty, and refined. Few can understand how constant association with a coarse-minded or unrefined person tortures one."

Then Violet began to understand many things, and to see that there was as much difference between a nature like Mrs. Ingram's and that of Lady Ryvers as there is between cotton and silk. Lady Ryvers was by birth a lady ; Mrs. Ingram was a lady both by birth and nature.

" You remind me," said Mrs. Ingram, " of a gentleman who said that he thought the cawing of a rook was a musical sound. One of his hearers scornfully asked why. He replied that the whole music of nature, including the song of birds, the ripple of streams, the murmur of the

wind, formed one magnificent harmony which could not be judged by a single note, any more than the beauty of an air could be judged by the playing of one note in it ; so that the cawing of a rook, which was not music, perhaps, in itself, formed part of the grand harmony of creation. In like manner, to form a perfect world, there must be in it people of all kinds, all natures, all temperaments, to make the grand and perfect whole. You understand ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Violet ; and to herself she added, “ I shall begin to think that I have come to school.”

It was a good school. She had been too angry at Ryversdale to see any good in anything, far too angry ; everything was hateful to her. She did not see any honor even in that to which honor was due. Here it was different. All that was noble, beautiful, or dignified in high birth, in a long line of descent, in hereditary nobility, was so placed before her that she could not refuse her respect and honor. She learned many things.

One warm, bright day in autumn Mrs. Ingram asked her to go with her to the churchyard at Elm Green.

“ I want to see my husband’s grave, Miss Beaton. I wonder if other people have the same sensation that I have —that being near the grave of one beloved seems to bring that beloved one nearer ? ”

“ I cannot tell,” replied Violet. “ Since I have been old enough to understand, I have lost no one by death.”

Quite suddenly, as it seemed to her, a great storm of emotion swept over her heart and soul. What if “ he ” died, the one man who had so completely changed the course of her life ? Would she care to sit by his grave that she might be nearer to him ?

“ I am always asking myself questions that I cannot answer,” thought Violet.

She had poetry enough and sympathy enough to note the beautiful expression on her companion’s fine old face as they drew nearer to the churchyard.

“ My husband has been buried twenty years,” said Mrs. Ingram, “ yet each time I go to his grave it seems to me that I am nearer to him ; and in my fancy, as I grow old, my memory of him grows younger. When he was buried, I remembered him as old and feeble ; now I find myself thinking of him as young, strong, vigorous, and handsome. My dear, which shall I find him in heaven ? Will he be

the old man with white hair who died full of years and honors, or will he be the handsome young fellow who never gave me any peace from the moment he met me until the hour he married me? I often wonder which it will be."

"Heaven seems to me the home of eternal youth," remarked Violet, reverently.

"Think of the old and the feeble, the weary and aged, who find refuge there," said Mrs. Ingram.

"Death gives back youth and vigor," returned Violet.

"How little we know, child, even the wisest and cleverest amongst us!" said Mrs. Ingram.

And then they came to the pretty old churchyard.

"The Ingolds have a grand family vault under the church," said Mrs. Ingram; "but my husband could not endure it. He loved the bright sunshine, the fresh air, and he prayed always that he might be buried here under the trees. My husband loved all nature, especially all outdoor nature. He was so bright and cheery, he took sunshine with him everywhere."

And, as they walked together to the green grave, the faithful old wife who had been so true to one love and one husband leaned on the arm of the beautiful young wife who had so impulsively and impatiently flung aside her obligations and duties. A large white marble cross stood at the head, great elm-trees shaded it, birds sung in the green depths, the fresh, sweet wind swept over it, bearing the breath of many flowers; it was a grave that seemed to take the bitterness from death. On the marble cross was the simple record of the man's life and death.

"You see, my dear," said Mrs. Ingram, "there is a space left for me, and we shall sleep together there, my husband and I, until the great day of doom. We shall stand together then, face to face, and there will not be the sound of an angry word between us. If ever you marry, my dear, marry as I did—from love."

Violet, in her simple honesty, was about to cry out, "I am married!" But she remembered in time that she had annulled her marriage, that she had taken off her wedding-ring.

Mrs. Ingram sat down on one of the iron seats scattered about the old churchyard.

"I am at the end of life!" she said slowly, "and you,

child, are at the beginning. You will love and marry some day ; you are too beautiful for men to pass you by. Love and marriage, the two great crowns, the two great mysteries of woman's life, will come to you. Think, when they do, of all that I say to you now. My husband lived with me thirty years, and when we meet face to face there will not be the sound of an angry word between us. Think of that, my dear—think of that."

And Violet did think. She remembered her fiery denunciations, her hot anger, her burning pride, her resentment against her husband—there would be far more than the sound of an angry word between them.

"A marriage such as ours was is heaven upon earth," said the old lady. "For thirty years my husband and I lived in the sweetest peace and harmony, and during all that time we never, Heaven be praised, had one angry word ! But there ~~was~~ ^{is} a secret in this, one that all sensible wives soon learn..."

"What is it?" cried Violet, eagerly.

"Forbearance," she replied. "That is the secret of happiness in married life—to bear and forbear, not to have wide open eyes for each other's faults, and, what is better still, to love with a grand, generous, noble love that loves in spite of faults."

"Is there such a love?" asked Violet.

"May Heaven send it to you some day!" said Mrs. Ingram. "That is the grandest love of all—not the love that idealizes and believes the object beloved to be perfect—that kind of love always ends in disappointment—but the grand, generous love that is not lessened by faults. My husband had faults ; I loved him in spite of them. I had faults, and he loved me in spite of them. We both knew that we were ordinary human beings, and we made allowance for each other. The result was, we never had one angry word. 'We have been married thirty years, and we have never had a quarrel,' my husband said when he lay dying ; nor should we have had one had we lived together fifty more."

"This differs from Aunt Alice's teaching," thought Violet, "and it differs greatly from my practice."

"I thought," she said, slowly, "that, just as there are always sharpest thorns beneath sweetest roses, so the longest thorns are hidden under the orange-blossoms."

"That may be ; but it is in the power of every sensible wife to blunt them ; they need never wound. Remember that when you wear orange-blossoms of your own."

"Yes, I shall think of you as a wife who had not one thorn in her wreath of orange-blossoms," said Violet.

"Say, rather, a wife, my dear, who bent and broke the point of every thorn she found," rejoined Mrs. Ingram.

Violet had plenty of food for meditation as they drove home.

CHAPTER XLV.

UP to this time Violet had believed herself to be perfectly in the right, that the conduct of her husband and his mother had been utterly unjustifiable, that she had been injured and wronged, and that in throwing off her allegiance to her husband and trying herself to break her bonds, she had acted bravely and nobly. But the hour spent in the churchyard rather changed her ideas. Love was not a matter of caprice, nor marriage a matter of whim, it was the most solemn of obligations. Certainly no woman could do as she had tried to do—break her own bonds.

She began to doubt herself—she who had been so confident in her might and right. What if she had done wrong after all?

She could not forget Randolph. The handsome face, the kindly voice, the love-light in his eyes, his constant care for her, his devotion to her, and his mad, passionate love for her, haunted her as they had never done before. She had hardened her heart against him ; she had exaggerated her own wrongs ; but she could not deaden her memory.

In those days Violet was a study. She was sure of no one feeling or emotion ; her brain, mind, and soul were in confusion. Love, revenge, tender memories of by-gone days, hatred of all that her husband loved, took possession of her by turns ; she could not tell whether she loved Randolph or hated him, whether she wished most to keep away from him, or longed most to see him again. She tried to understand herself, and could not. Was it love of him that kept her awake at night, thinking of him and going over in fancy every hour they had spent together ?

Was it love that kept the sound of his voice ever in her ears? Was it love or hate? She could not tell; she did not know.

"I cannot understand my own heart," she said to herself; "much less could any one else understand it."

One morning—she had dreamed of Randolph all night—Mrs. Ingram asked her why she looked so thoughtful.

"I have been trying," answered Violet, "to solve a problem for myself, and I cannot do it. I was wondering whether in any circumstances whatever a wife ought to leave her husband."

"Certainly not," was the stern reply. "No matter whether she be in the right or in the wrong, the world shows its estimate of such women by ignoring them."

"But suppose that a man is cruel to his wife, ill-uses her, abuses her—what then?"

"I should say that a woman in fear of her life might be justified in leaving her husband; but even in that case I do not quite approve of it. I think this, that, let a man be bad as he may, his wife should have patience with him, and try to make him better."

"You would think very badly, then, of any wife who left her husband for a smaller matter than ill-usage?"

"I should despise any woman who thought lightly or acted carelessly with regard to the greatest obligation and the most sacred tie life holds. Women have so much in their power; they have two great weapons, patience and forbearance."

"You have seen only the bright side of marriage, Mrs. Ingram," said Violet sadly.

"I have lived many years, and I have seen a great deal of life," replied the elder woman.

"Suppose that two people did not really agree," Violet went on—"that the husband liked one kind of life, the wife another, and that they had no one thought in common, that the wife hated what the husband loved, and *vice versa*—would you not think that a reason for leaving each other?"

"No, indeed, I should not. Leaving husband or wife for such trifles as those, I should consider madness or wickedness," said Mrs. Ingram.

"Suppose," said Violet, rushing boldly to her fate, "that a man married a girl beneath him in rank, and that,

when he took her home, his friends treated her unkindly, even tried to prove that her marriage was not legal—would she not be justified in leaving him?"

"Certainly not. Any wife in such a position as that, if she had a particle of common sense, would try conciliation, would do her best to please her husband's family."

"Go one step further," said Violet. "Suppose that the husband had grossly deceived the girl, beguiled her into marrying him by telling, or rather by acting, a deliberate lie—what would you say then?"

"I should still say her duty was to remain with him. The sanctity of the marriage-tie is too solemn to allow of its being broken; and, if it were broken on one pretext, it would be on others. There is but one course, and that is to keep it inviolable."

Violet carried those words in her heart for many long days.

That same evening a surprise was in store for her. Mrs. Ingram sent for her earlier than usual to her room. She seemed unusually excited.

"My dear," she said, "I want you. I have a letter from my granddaughter; she is coming to-night. It is very kind of her. She is so beautiful and so brilliant that she has many invitations; she has given up several to come to me."

"What do you wish me to do?" asked Violet, gently.

"Give orders about her rooms. Gwendoline is very particular; and, indeed, she is quite right to be; her life is most precious."

Only one word in Mrs. Ingram's answer struck Violet, and that was "Gwendoline," a name that was so uncommon, yet horribly familiar to her. The very sound of it seemed to bring the dowager Lady Ryvers before her, she who had spoken so often of Gwendoline Marr. She turned suddenly white, she grew faint, and trembled; yet surely there were many Gwendolines in the world! Why that awful spasm of fear? She must know who this girl was, and that at once.

"What a pretty name—Gwendoline!" she said. "An old English name, is it not?"

"Yes—one much used in the Marr family. My granddaughter is Gwendoline Marr."

For a few minutes it seemed to Violet as though the

ground were opening beneath her feet. Of all the strange fates in the world, it was the strangest that was bringing her thither. Not until this moment did she recognize how jealous she had been of Gwendoline Marr, the girl whom the dowager Lady Ryvers and Lady Lester loved, the girl whom they had all wished Randolph to marry. It had been a smoldering fire, and now suddenly it broke into a burning flame. She was bitterly jealous of her. How they would have welcomed Gwendoline Marr! How they would have *fêted* and caressed her! What strange fate had brought them together? Violet knew well that the one great desire of the dowager Lady Ryvers' heart was to find her marriage illegal, so that Gwendoline Marr might take her place.

It seemed strange to her to find Mrs. Ingram still talking.

"Gwendoline Marr will be one of the richest heiresses in England. She has all the Marr estates, and she will have all that I have to leave her. Gwendoline is beautiful too. You will admire her; every one does. She has many suitors. She will marry well some day. She is all that I have left living in the world."

Still Violet stood motionless, saying to herself over and over again :

"What fate has sent me to meet Gwendoline Marr?"

"I had but one daughter," continued the old lady, "my beautiful, bonny daughter Jean, and Jean married Sir Randal Marr. She died many years since, when Gwendoline was quite a little girl; yet, although I have so much money to leave her, they would not let my grandchild come to live with me. Lady James has educated her, Miss Beaton. When she has nothing better to do, they let her come and spend a week or two with me, my bonny Jean's daughter."

Violet did not wonder much that a young, brilliant, and beautiful woman should avoid Queen's Elm, if possible.

"I am always well pleased when she comes, she brings so much sunshine and brightness with her. Now, Miss Beaton, will you attend to the rooms? Tell the housekeeper to have good fires made in them. Tell her to prepare the blue suite; Gwendoline likes it."

It seemed to Violet the very irony of fate that she should stand there listening to orders as to how Gwendoline Marr was to be made comfortable. She was prompted more than once to cry out that she would not do it. Why should she

do anything for Gwendoline Marr, whose name had been made an instrument of torture to her? Then curiosity to see the girl whom the dowager Lady Ryvers wished to take her place reigned supreme.

She went away to give the orders, and to tell the housekeeper to have everything ready for Miss Marr.

The housekeeper looked delighted when she heard the intelligence.

"It is always a bright day for us when Miss Marr comes," she said.

Violet scrutinized her eagerly; she longed to know more and hear more about her rival, but it was impossible to ask. The housekeeper read the question in her eyes.

"She is a lovely lady, our Miss Marr," she continued, "and she has more lovers, I should think, than there are days in the year."

"She cannot love them all," Violet replied, smiling. "Does the little crowd of admirers follow her here?"

"No; when Miss Marr comes to stay with our mistress, she devotes all her time to her. We have no visitors at Queen's Elm."

A hundred questions trembled on Violet's lips, but she would not ask one. It was so strange, this meeting the great heiress there. After all, it was perhaps as well. Now she would see what her rival was like, the girl whom Lady Ryvers so vehemently desired that her son should marry.

All day she was restless; she could not give her full and undivided thoughts to what she was doing. She repeated over and over again to herself, each time with fresh wonder that she was in the home of the only woman who had ever been her rival. What would her husband say if he knew? To what complication would it give rise? She was not much surprised to find that the order of the house was somewhat changed. The dinner was later, and some magnificent silver service was disinterred; there was a general air of expectation.

Violet could have counted the beats of her heart; even Mrs. Ingram's worn, placid face was moved as though with some great pleasure. It was after sunset when Violet heard the sound of carriage-wheels. She absented herself on some pretext, not caring to be present when the two ladies met. She was rather frightened by her own emo-

tion ; she did not quite understand it. Was it love or jealousy that stirred her heart with such keen interest ?

When the dinner-bell rang, she went into the drawing-room, wondering why Mrs. Ingram had not sent for her as usual ; and then she saw standing there a woman beautiful as a dream, tall and stately, yet not proud—a graceful, gracious woman, with an exquisite face and eyes soft and dark as night.

Miss Marr went up to her with white outstretched hands.

"Mrs. Ingram has been speaking of you," she said. "I am pleased to see you ; you are a great comfort to her."

And so the hands of the two women whose lives crossed so strangely met for the first time.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THERE was no previous knowledge of Violet on Miss Marr's part ; the name of "Miss Beaton" told her nothing. She looked long and lingeringly at the beautiful face before her.

The heiress' warm, genial manner had touched Violet's heart, and then, to make her welcome complete, the lovely brunette drew Violet down to a seat on the couch by her side.

" You must find life very dull at Queen's Elm," she said ; "you must have plenty of courage to bear it."

Something in the fair face told the wealthy girl that perhaps it was not so bravely borne after all ; there was a restlessness and a longing upon it. Miss Marr smiled, as she continued :

" Coming to Queen's Elm always seems to me like coming to another world ; it is so quaint, so quiet, so out of all the other grooves of life. The first week I tolerate it ; the second, I begin to feel dull ; the third, I am tired ; and the fourth, I count the hours until I get away. I generally come at this time of the year and remain for a month ; then I find myself recruited for Christmas."

Miss Marr talked on purposely, because she saw confusion and embarrassment in the face of her companion. Why it should be so she could not think, being a perfect stranger to her.

" How strange it must seem to have no men in the house !" the heiress said, laughing. " Three ladies all alone

—I cannot imagine anything more quiet and tame. We shall not be able to get up even the faintest attempt at a sensation of any kind. Still I may be grateful that you are here."

"That girl has a story," said Miss Marr to herself, when she was alone; "she has a story of no common kind written on her face."

Violet, on her part, watching the heiress, came to the conclusion that, with all her outward brilliancy and brightness, she was not really happy. When Violet went suddenly into a room, she would find her sad, very often with traces of tears on her face. When she was off her guard, the heiress did not appear to be the same brilliant woman the world judged her.

For some few days after her arrival she was listless, and seemed to be buried in deep thought, and she took little part in the conversation going on around her.

"Gwennie, you have lost your high spirits," Mrs. Ingram said to her one day; "you do not laugh and talk as you used to do."

"I am growing old and steady, grandmamma. Life loses its sweetest illusions as the years pass."

"Keep them as long as you can," said Mrs. Ingram. "Once gone, they can never be recalled."

"I am not sure that I would recall mine if I could," said Miss Marr. "Miss Beaton, have you had many illusions?"

Violet paused for a moment before she answered. Had she? They said illusions were sweet. Had she found any part of life sweet?

Yes, when she first knew her brave, handsome young lover, when he had wooed her in "June's palace paved with gold," when she had first believed in him and his genius, before she knew that he belonged to the class she detested. Yes; she had had her illusions.

"Yes," she replied, "I have had some; but they are dead."

And, strangely enough, the sweetest illusion of both had been love of the same man.

Days passed on, and the two women unconsciously drew nearer to each other. The heiress liked the beautiful, golden-haired woman whose fair face told a story that no one yet had read and Violet half liked, half feared, the lovely brunette who should—so her family said—have been

her husband's wife. Was it love of her husband that shadowed the face of Miss Marr? Why did she sit hour after hour with such a listless expression on her face, with such a far-off look in her dark eyes? Was it for love of him? Was it for love of him that this girl seemed to live in the world, but not to be of it?

In the morning, when the letter-bag was opened, it was amusing to see how many letters were addressed to the heiress. None ever came to Violet.

"What a number of letters, Gwennie!" said Mrs. Ingram once.

"Some are begging-letters, explained her granddaughter, "some bills, some circulars—"

"And some love-letters!" interposed Mrs. Ingram.

"Yes," replied the girl, with a dreary sigh, "there are many love-letters; those are the most tiresome of all."

"I should not have thought so at your age," said Mrs. Ingram.

"I am older than my years," sighed the heiress.

And Violet wondered if it were love for Randolph, Lord Ryvers, that made her older than her years. Love often lies dormant until something quickens it into active life. Violet might have lived for years without knowing whether she loved or hated her husband most, but for the jealousy that sprung into life when she found that another woman loved him. She had never been jealous; she did not know what the feeling was like. The pain was quite new to her, but none the less bitter.

When Violet entered the gates of Queen's Elm, the love that she had for her husband was weak and feeble. Jealousy was the wind that fanned the smoldering fire into fiercest blaze.

She had noticed more than once that Miss Marr always wore a gold locket. In the morning it was half hidden by the folds of her bodice, in the evening it shone on her fair, shapely neck; and Violet wondered why her hand sought it incessantly. Whether she sat reading, talking, or thinking, she nearly always held it in her hand. If any one addressed her suddenly, if any unexpected noise startled her, her hand sought the locket or clasped it more tightly still.

One morning it so happened that Violet went to Miss Marr's room with a message from Mrs. Ingram. She found her standing by the window, with the locket in her hand.

It was most elaborately and exquisitely chased, with a magnificent diamond in the center. Violet saw in a moment the cloud upon her face, and asked, hurriedly :

“ What is the matter, Miss Marr ? ”

The heiress looked up with a smile and a sigh.

“ I am in trouble,” she said ; “ will you help me ? Some thing has gone wrong with the spring of my locket—it will not close. Will you look at it, Miss Beaton ? ”

Violet took the chain from her hands ; and then she saw within it a portrait of her husband. She saw the laughing blue eyes, so sunny and so true, the cluster of fair hair round the noble brow, the beautiful mouth, so firm, yet with the sweet and gracious curves that belong to a woman. A sharp, bitter pain went through her heart ; for one moment she stood bewildered ; her face lost all its color, and a mist came before her eyes.

Her husband’s portrait ! Yet this other woman wore it and cherished it, clasped it and kissed it !

“ Do you see where the spring is injured ? ” asked Miss Marr.

“ No,” answered Violet. “ I do not understand—”

Her voice was so faint and weary that the heiress, in her warm, impulsive kindness, took the locket and chain from her hands.

“ How cruel I am to tease you ! ” she said. “ You are tired.” Then, with a quick, sudden gesture, she opened the locket again, and went on—“ I heard you say yesterday that you were a good reader of character from faces ; tell me what you think of that face.”

It was a curious situation, those two women—the fair face of the one white with jealousy and pain, the face of the other flushed with emotion—holding between them the portrait of the man beloved by one and husband of the other.

“ Tell me,” repeated Miss Marr, “ what you think of it ? ”

“ It is very handsome.”

“ Oh,” interrupted the heiress, “ that is the least of it ! I am not speaking or thinking merely of its beauty, although to me it is the most perfect face in the wide world. What do you think of the expression in those eyes ? ”

“ They look as though they loved some one very much,” Violet said, involuntarily.

“ Ah ? Would to Heaven that ‘ some one ’ were myself ! ”

cried the heiress. Then her head drooped and a crimson flame burned her face. "I did not think what I was saying," she went on, piteously. "Forget you heard that, Miss Beaton. Yet why should I be ashamed of it? It eases my heart, and I may trust you. This is the portrait of the one that makes the whole light of earth to me, the one that changes earth into heaven. And yet——"

She broke off abruptly. Violet looked at her; her whole face quivered with pain.

"I never part with it," resumed Miss Marr. "I have given my love, my heart, my peace of mind, my life itself, and all I have in return is this portrait—nothing more. Was there ever, do you think, a fate like mine? Men say I am beautiful. I have almost every gift this world could give me, and yet I cannot win the one thing for which I would give them all—the love of that fair-faced man. I would give my wealth, my beauty, my life, if but once and for one moment he would take me in his arms and say that he loved me. I have wearied Heaven with prayers. I think it no shame to ask for the gift of a good man's love, and I have prayed for it; but I have never won it. The world is empty to me," she continued, "because this man does not love me. It is strange what capricious, willful, miserable mortals we are. I have everything one would think to make me happy; yet the poorest peasant-woman married to the husband she loves is happier than I. I fixed my heart on one thing, and I have not attained it. I have prayed one prayer; it has been denied me. All heaven and earth are dark, void, and dreary to me, because the desire of my heart has not been accorded to me."

And Violet, as she listened to these passionate words, could only repeat over and over again to herself:

"The man whom she loves is my husband, and I have left him."

"Now," said Miss Marr, with a quick look at her companion, "you would think it undignified, perhaps, to love any man after this fashion?"

"No," answered Violet, gently; "I cannot judge."

"I am not all to blame," continued the heiress. "I admit that I loved him the first moment I saw him; but, if I had felt sure he did not and never would care for me, I should have tried to trample my love under foot, and have avoided him. But I was deceived."

With a sudden pang Violet looked up at her. Who had deceived her? Had Randolph, who had sworn to her over and over again that he loved her and her only—had he tried to win the loving, passionate heart of this beautiful woman before her? She did not know that life held such a terrible pain as this.

"You were deceived?" she questioned, slowly.

"Yes, but not by him—never by him," Miss Marr replied, hastily. "There is not the faintest shadow of guile in his face. Look at it. There is none in his eyes. Look at them. There is none in his heart. Heaven bless him! He would not know how to deceive any one."

And Violet, as she listened, almost gasped for breath. She had accused this same man of deceit beyond words, because he had concealed from her the rank and title which he knew she hated. She had left him; and here was this other woman, who loved him so well, bearing testimony to his stainless honor and truth. Who was right, and who was wrong? Violet was puzzled and bewildered; her faith in herself was shaken.

"Who deceived you," she asked, "if it were not this man whom you love?" And Miss Marr little dreamed that the girl's whole soul was in suspense as she awaited the answer.

"It was not he," answered the heiress, with a loving glance at the photograph; "it was his mother. I could not say with truth that she told me in so many words that he loved me and wanted me to be his wife; but she gave me that impression, she led me to believe that the great hope of his life was to win me—and all the time he did not care for me; I do not even think he was much interested in me."

"Why did she mislead you?" asked Violet.

"I cannot tell. She is very proud and very worldly-wise. She wanted a wife for her son, and she thought she could choose for him; and, to my surprise, she selected me. Still it was not honest to deceive me, for it has blighted my life."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Violet, involuntarily.

"Yes, it has," said Miss Marr, sadly. "I have no real interest in anything. I go through a certain amount of what is called gayety. I dance, sing, play, ride; I take my place in society; I receive the flattery and homage of I cannot

say how many admirers ; I hear myself called beautiful, a great heiress, a queen of society—and all the time my heart is dead, dead as the leaves that fall in autumn. I never thought," she continued dreamily ; " if I had, things would have been different. Because her words flattered the secret desire of my heart, I believed them. If I had reflected, I should have had less faith in her."

" But," said Violet, " I do not understand how any one could have deceived you in a matter of that kind. I should have thought your own heart would have spoken."

" My own heart blinded me," she answered, with a sigh ; " yet, now that I come to think of it, I marvel that I built so much upon so little. I admit that I loved Randolph at first sight ; but he never misled me by affecting any unusual interest in me. Would it interest you to hear my story ? "

" Yes," replied Violet frankly ; " nothing would interest me more."

" Then," said the heiress, gently, " sit down and listen to it. No ; do not give me back the photograph. Hold that in your hands. Examine closely the beautiful sensitive face which is the only excuse I have for my weakness. When I weigh all the circumstances, I feel that I may forgive myself any amount of folly ; " and Miss Marr paused for a few moments before telling her story.

CHAPTER XLVII.

" I AM an only child," began the heiress. " My father, Sir Randal Marr, was a very wealthy man. Late in life he married my mother, Jean Ingram, who died soon after I was born ; and I am the sole representative of the two wealthy and powerful families—hard enough for one solitary girl, is it not ? When grandmamma here dies, many thousands will come to me ; but, oh, Miss Beaton, money will not bring me any happiness—all the money in the world cannot purchase love, and it is love that I want ! I have too much wealth ; " and the girl sighed wearily. " You see, Miss Beaton, I have not had that which is of the greatest value to any girl, the training of a good mother. I have lived amongst my relatives, all good, kindly, worldly people. I have been spoiled from the very day I was born. I have never had what people call a home. I made my *début*

in the fashionable world when I was just seventeen ; I am twenty-two now, and far more tired of life than many a woman of sixty. You see, I had not the one great desire of my life granted.

" I was very young, very happy, and light of heart when Lady Ryvers invited me to Ryversdale. She had said little about her son, but just at that time he was at home. I remember how and where I first saw him—this man whom I love so well. Look, Miss Beaton—his eyes seem to smile into mine. He is called Lord Ryvers, of Ryversdale, and by nature he is a poet and an artist. I saw him first on the broad terrace at Ryversdale. I shall always picture him to myself as I saw him then. He was watching the sun set over the broad, beautiful river ; there was a glorious light on his face as the sun's rays fell upon him. My heart went out to him before he had seen me. When our eyes met, when he spoke to me, I knew that he was the one man in the wide world for me. My heart seemed to have found rest, to have gained its home. Lady Ryvers introduced us, and then proceeded to tell me before him how amazed she was that he would persist in painting.

" 'He is never happy away from his palette and brushes,' she said ; 'he looks at everything with the eyes of a painter, instead of with the eyes of an ordinary man ; he sees nothing but color and form.'

" 'It is a libel, Miss Marr,' Lord Ryvers laughed ; 'the difference between the eyes of an artist and those of an ordinary man, as my mother expresses it, is that the artist sees most.'

" 'Do not let him beguile you, Miss Marr,' said Lady Ryvers, smiling at me. 'He seems pleased to see you, but he is studying your coloring ; he thinks you are like the work of a Titian or a Velasquez.'

" From these few words sprung a long conversation.

" I had met no one like him. True, I had seen plenty of men, some handsome, some clever, and some accomplished ; but this one seemed to be perfect. He was nobleman, gentleman, scholar, poet, and artist combined ; add to that the charm of a handsome face and graceful manner, and even then you have but a faint idea of Lord Ryvers as I knew him.

" All my heart went out to him, and, alas, it has never come back to me ! Perhaps, had I been more like other

girls, had I had home, parents, sisters, I should not have trusted all my life to one venture ; I should not have been so quick, so eager to love.

"The knowledge that I was to be in the house with him for some few weeks filled my whole soul with happiness. My present self looks back to that bright young self as to another person. With my dead heart, I think I can never be the girl who found the very light of the sun changed because she had learned to love.

"Lady Ryvers deceived me by continually repeating little phrases to me that her son had used in speaking of me, and she gave to them a different meaning, a different interpretation from that which he intended. I do not believe now that he ever said he loved me, or expressed any desire to make me his wife ; but she gave me to understand that he did so.

"'My son thinks so much of your taste, Miss Marr ! ' My son will not decide until you have given your opinion Miss Marr,' was what she was always telling me.

"To me she made no secret of her own wishes. 'I should like you for my daughter-in-law,' she would say ; 'and I have every reason to hope that my wish will be gratified. My son is not of age yet ; but when he is he will say in words what he now thinks.' Miss Beaton, what should you have drawn from such words ? "

"A certain conclusion that Lady Ryvers wished you to marry her son," answered Violet, "but not that the son himself had the same thought."

"You are quite right ; it was my own love that misled me. If the same thing had been said to me of any one else I should have been most indignant—indeed, I would not have listened to it. It was but second-hand wooing at the best. Lady Ryvers was so clever, so skillful, that, without clothing the idea in words, she gave me to understand that her son loved me, but that he did not think it prudent to say anything of love or marriage until he was of age. I was blind. I gave myself up to a fool's paradise, I ought to have known that love and prudence are as far apart as the poles. I have paid the penalty of my blindness with the happiness of my whole life.

"What the heart wishes it soon believes. Deceived by Lady Ryvers, I really believed that Lord Ryvers cared for me, and that when we were both older he would ask me to

be his wife. True, there was nothing lover-like in his manner. He talked to me about pictures because I loved them ; and, when I found that painting was the one thing for which he cared most, I studied it. Not that I tried to paint ; but I read the lives of great artists, I read what clever men wrote of them, so that when he spoke of anything I could understand all his references. He was delighted. He has sisters ; but they either did not care for such subjects or it had been an express wish of Lady Ryvers that they should not encourage him in the matter of art. The only time when she seemed to tolerate painting was when Lord Ryvers discussed it with me."

Again a pain that was both keen and bitter went through Violet's heart. How much better this woman had loved him than she herself had done ! The rich heiress had studied the things he loved, while she had never dreamed of so doing ; she had even at times felt impatient with his devotion to art. The contrast struck her most forcibly.

"I know," continued Miss Marr, "that that was the tie between us. I am sure now that nothing else was in his mind. He would ask me to join him in his rambles through the woods ; but it was never to make love to me, only to talk of the coloring of the leaves and the springing grasses. We spent hours by the beautiful reach of the river, by the well in the grounds ; and, when we returned, Lady Ryvers met us always with the same smile. But I knew he had never made love to me ; we had talked of various things, but never of love.

"It was during those hours that I found out that Lord Ryvers was one of the most romantic of men, that he had the soul of a poet with the genius of an artist. I loved him more and more. With every sun that rose and set, my love grew deeper, stronger, firmer, and my heart so one with his that I can never take it from him.

"If he had been vain, as many young men at that age are, he must have read my secret. I was often ashamed of the love-light in my eyes, of the glow on my face—often most terribly ashamed ; but he was serenely unconscious of it all. If he spoke, and the sudden sound of his voice sent all the tell-tale blood to my face, he would tell me that I had the rich coloring of a Velasquez ; if emotion drove the color from my face, he would say that I had

changed into a Greuze ; but he neither knew nor dreamed that the change of color was for him.

" We were together for seven weeks—not long, you will think, to influence a life ; it has colored all mine. They were almost the only happy weeks of my life ; I have known little happiness since. Then my visit ended. We met again at Christmas, at Holt Castle—Lady Ryvers, with her son and her daughter Marguerite, was there—and there my hopes were confirmed. Not by him, though ; he was always the same—kind, gentle, and chivalrous in his manner, interested in our conversations, but never breathing the word 'love.'

" It was at Holt Castle that Lady Ryvers opened her heart to me that her dearest wish was that I should be mistress of Ryversdale, that she was sure Randolph loved me. She was equally sure that, when he was of age, he would ask me to be his wife. She told me that he had peculiar ideas of marriage ; but I have discovered since then that they were of a very different kind from what I expected.

" Lady Ryvers was very cruel in talking to me after this fashion. She would speak of the time when I should be mistress of Ryversdale as though it were a certainty. One day I ventured to say to her :

" ' You speak as though I were engaged to your son, Lady Ryvers, whereas he has never said one word of love to me—never one.'

" ' He will do so,' she said, smiling, ' when the right time comes.'

" Then I asked her shyly why she was so anxious that I should marry him, and she told me frankly that ever since she had heard of and seen me, she had wished me to be her son's wife.

" ' Not for your money, dear,' she said, ' although a fortune like yours gives influence and has great advantages—it will help Randolph to make a position for himself second to none in the land. It is because you are in every way fitted for him. You have every one of the gifts and advantages that I desire for him ; you have not one of the drawbacks that would have grieved me.'

" It was very consoling ; but I should have valued one word of love from the son more than all these overtures from the mother. We were together three weeks at Holt

Castle ; adding those to the seven I spent at Ryversdale, I count my life ten happy weeks. Some have ten happy years, some have a whole happy life ; I have had ten perfect weeks."

" But you may be happy yet," said Violet ; " you will not spend the whole of your life in lamenting for one who did not love you."

" It sounds like lunacy," said Miss Marr ; " but what am I to do ? I have given my love ; I cannot recall it. It is not my fault. There are some things irresistible, and this is one. I would free myself from this bondage of a terrible love if I could. Do you know what this love will do for me ? "

" No," answered Violet, wonderingly.

" It will kill me, sooner or later. No one can live long with a broken heart ; and mine is surely broken."

Then Violet wondered more and more. This was how Monica had spoken. She asked herself if Randolph had left her, had gone away from St. Byno's without telling her he loved her, would her heart have broken ? would she have felt as though all life were ended ? And this time there was a thrill both of pain and pleasure in her heart as the answer came. She was beginning to think differently of her husband, viewing him in the light of another woman's love.

" The strangest part of the story is yet to come," said Miss Marr. " Lady Ryvers wrote to me in the month of April, and told me that her son had asked, as a special favor before he settled in life, that he might have one year for a sketching-tour. He had promised her that, if she would continue her administration of his estates, and extend her reign until the expiration of that time, he would willingly attend to the duties she was most anxious to urge upon him. That was in April. In June I went to Ryversdale. Of course he was absent, and the difference was as great as between night and day. Still Lady Ryvers talked to me in the same fashion—of what I should do when I went to reign over the grand old house where she had been mistress so long, what plan of life she wished Randolph to pursue."

Again came the mingled sense of pain and pleasure, so new to Violet, at the sound of her husband's name on her rival's lips.

"This autumn," continued the heiress, "I was staying with some friends near Ryversdale, and I heard strange rumors about the young heir. At last I saw Lady Ryvers, and she prayed of me so urgently to go to her at Ryversdale that I could not refuse. But, ah me, what a different place it was! A blight seemed to have fallen over it, Lady Ryvers looked like a woman pressed down by some terrible sorrow, and after awhile, she told it to me. It was a strange story, but, knowing her son's romantic nature, I cannot say that it surprised me."

It was by a supreme effort that Violet refrained from speaking; she felt that it was her own story she was about to hear, and, for some inexplicable reason, she dreaded hearing it.

"It seems," continued Miss Marr, "that Lord Ryvers always had a dread of being married for money or title, that the great wish of his heart was to marry for love. That was his dream, just as some dream of a seat in Parliament and others of the Victoria Cross. It was the desire of his heart, the one grand ambition of his life. As I have told you, he went on a sketching-tour. He would have no valet, no servant; he left all ceremony and formality behind him. He dropped even his name and title for a time; he wanted to realize to its fullest extent the freedom and charm of an artist's life. It was his whim, his fancy, his last real glimpse of liberty before he entered upon public life. No one can say that he was to blame. While he was on this sketching-tour, he—— Mind, my dear Miss Beaton, you are letting my locket fall!"—for the treasure had slipped from the white trembling hands.

Miss Marr raised it, and touched it with her lips.

Noting her companion's action, Violet's face flushed with anger. Her husband had kissed her face a thousand times with passionate kisses, and her heart had not been stirred—she had taken them very much as her right; but now, as the beautiful lips of Miss Marr touched her husband's pictured face, something rushed through both heart and brain, leaving her faint and bewildered.

The heiress put the portrait into her hand, and went on.

"During the sketching-tour he met some beautiful country-girl, quite uneducated, I believe. He fell in love with her. Neither his name nor his rank did he disclose.

He wooed her as a poor artist. Lady Ryvers does not seem to think that she cared very much for him; but I do not believe that. Why, in that case, did she marry him? If one does not marry for money, it must be for love. I should think this young girl married Lord Ryvers, believing him to be an artist working for his daily bread. The strangest part of the story is that she is what you seldom find so young a girl to be, a real democrat. She was brought up, it seems, to detest and condemn all aristocrats; and Randolph, who understood this, knew well that she would never marry him if she knew his name and position. He kept both secrets from her. Lady Ryvers at first suspected that she knew it, and had entrapped her son; now it seems quite certain she was ignorant of every fact connected with him, except that he was an artist. He managed to keep his secret for some time. In the end she found it out. Lady Ryvers says that she never liked him afterward."

"It was a gross deception!" cried Violet, suddenly.

"It was nothing of the kind," said the heiress, with flashing eyes. "Look at his face there; it is open as the day. No man with a face like that could be deceitful. It shows—it shows," she continued, wringing her jeweled hands, "that no one understands him as I do, no one in all the wide world. Deceit never entered his soul: it could not, even as a dark spirit cannot enter heaven. It was not deceit. I will tell you what it was—the graceful poetical fancy of an artist, the whim of a man who wanted to be loved for himself and married for himself; and I say, let who will declare to the contrary, that there was no harm in it, no shadow of guile or deceit. What do you candidly think yourself?"

And Miss Marr fixed her eyes on the pale, agitated face, and waited for an answer.

"What do you candidly think yourself?" she repeated.

It was a crucial question, a trying moment. For the first time since she had found out her husband's secret, she felt that she had judged him too hardly, and had not given sufficient consideration to the motives which actuated him.

"It matters little what I think," said Violet. "The girl looked at it from her point of view, the man from his."

"The girl wanted shaking!" declared Miss Marr.

For a few minutes Violet was quelled by the heiress'

sudden outburst. Hitherto she had felt that the wrong and injury were all on her side. She had taken no tolerant view of her husband's conduct. But to be told that she "wanted shaking" was a shock to her which brought a flush of color to her fair face and light to her eyes.

"Why do you say that?" she asked, coldly.

"Why, any one could answer that question!" declared Miss Marr. "Here is a girl living quietly in the country, without expectations of any kind, and a gentleman falls in love with her. He does not love and ride away, as many men would have done; he does not play fast and loose with her. He marries her, he gives her the richest dower that a king could give to a queen, the first, best, and truest love of his heart. What more royal dower can man give to woman than that? He gives her one of the oldest names in the land and one of the most stainless. He gives her wealth, luxury, every comfort and delight that any woman could desire. I maintain that she ought to be grateful to him. I should have been. I only wish to Heaven he had given me one tithe of the love he has given to her!"

A world of wistful longing shone in the dark, beautiful face, a world of passionate love and pain.

"Why do you think she is not grateful?" asked Violet, gently.

"I know she is not; the dowager told me about it. She, this young wife, really Lady Ryvers, although she seems never to have used the name, was brought up in some extraordinary fashion to hate, without rhyme and reason, all aristocrats; and, when she found that she had married one of the class she hates, all her love seemed to die. Lady Ryvers assured me that she believed honestly that all the love was on his side. Was that being grateful? I think when she found what his marriage had cost him she ought to have been doubly grateful to him, she ought to have loved him more than ever. I should in her place. Lady Ryvers said he never looked quite happy. Then, after all, she left him."

"Left him?" repeated Violet, mechanically.

She wondered if this other woman could hear the quick beating of her heart; to her it seemed to drown all other sounds.

"Yes—left him"—there was a passionate ring of scorn in the speaker's voice—"left him; but I must own that she

seems to have had great provocation. Lady Ryvers had wanted me to be her son's wife ; this marriage was altogether distasteful to her. The girl was very beautiful ; but she was high-spirited and willful. The dowager might have made matters much pleasanter, but she never tried. The Ryverses are all proud people. This girl was just as proud, but in the very opposite direction. She admired all that they disliked, she contemned all that they most admired ; she did not abate one of her prejudices ; she gave back coldness for coldness, pride for pride. Ah me, I would not have done so had I been in her place!"

"What would you have done?" asked Violet, wistfully.

She did not like this portrait of herself drawn by another hand.

"I, for his dear sake, would have done my best to conciliate them," she replied ; "I would have trampled all my own miserable feelings under foot ; I would have thought first of him and his interests ; I should have studied him, not asserted myself, as she did."

Again the warm blood rushed over Violet's face, and a mist seemed to hide the face of her husband from her view.

"True, feeling makes all the difference," said Miss Marr. "I should have done all this because I loved him ; she failed to do it because she did not love him enough."

Did she not? Was it love, hate, or jealousy that sent that burning thrill through her heart, that made her long almost to check the very words that came from her rival's lips?

"It was, or rather it is, a sad story altogether," continued the heiress. "I really think that if the dowager had seen that the girl loved her son, she might in time have learned to like her ; but she assured me that she did not love him. When she saw this, when she realized what a fatal mistake the marriage was she, the dowager, took a desperate, and, I think, most unjustifiable step. She tried to set the marriage aside. I do not know on what grounds or under what plea. I condemn the action altogether. Nor can I understand it on the part of a woman like Lady Ryvers, unless she were driven almost to despair ; but she did it. She thought that, as her son was not of age, some flaw might be found in the marriage, and that it could be set aside."

"I call that wicked," cried Violet, with hurrying breath—"wicked and cruel!"

"I quite agree with you," said Miss Marr. "Nothing could justify such conduct. It had a fatal result, too. Lady Ryvers wrote to London to consult a firm of lawyers about the validity of the marriage, and most unfortunately, through the mistake of a servant, the answer to this letter was taken to the young wife. She read it, and it drove her almost mad."

Faster and faster beat the heart of the listening girl. This was how her conduct looked to others; this was how others thought and spoke of her.

"She went to the dowager with the open letter in her hand. There was a terrible scene between them. She was proud, indignant—the dowager cool, contemptuous. She declared that she would save them all trouble, that she would annul her marriage herself. She left them; and they have neither seen nor heard of her since. A strange story, is it not?"

"Most strange," replied Violet, with quivering lips.

"How many lives are spoiled by this unfortunate marriage!" said Miss Marr. "Mine, for I shall never love any one else; Lord Ryvers', for he is the most miserable of men; the poor young wife's, for she must be wretched; and the dowager's, who can never be happy again. All those lives, which might otherwise have been happy, have been spoiled by this one most unhappy marriage. When I last visited there, Ryversdale did not seem like the same place. Lord Ryvers had gone away, vowing that he would never return until he had found his wife; Monica Ryvers, one of the sweetest and brightest of girls, was never without tears in her eyes; the dowager was quite unlike herself. It was a most miserable visit for me, and I was glad when it ended. Of course, what must be, must be; but, oh, how happy we should all have been if he had chosen me!"

"It seems that the best thing would be for the young wife to die," remarked Violet, dreamily; "that would leave him free."

But Miss Marr shook her head.

"It would make no difference," she said. "If he did not care for me before his heart was filled with love for his young wife, it is not likely that he would do so now. Her death would make no difference to me."

"If he loves her so very much, one would imagine that he would set to work to find her," observed Violet.

"It would be useless to look for her. She told her husband that, even if they met face to face, she would never return to him; and the dowager quite believes it. She says she does not believe that anything would induce her to return."

"Is she glad of it?" asked Violet, impulsively.

"I do not think so. I believe she would be glad to undo all that she has done. She was most bitterly annoyed with regard to the marriage at the time; but, now that she sees how unhappy her son is, she would like to undo her part in producing the present state of affairs, if she could."

"Is he so very unhappy?" asked Violet, with a strange softening in her voice.

"Yes. He has gone to London, and his mother says he is giving himself up wholly to art. He shuts himself up, he sees no one, speaks to no one, paints all day, is losing all his grand opportunities, will not hear of public life, and all for love of a girl who cares so little for him that she has left him. I would not have left him. If he had been the worst of criminals, instead of the best of men, I would not have left him. I would have gone with him to prison and to the gallows; I would have stood by his side on the scaffold. But then I love him, and she does not."

Another burning blush, more quick beating of the heart. The locket that held the handsome face almost fell from Violet's hands.

"How will it all end?" she asked, suddenly.

And the heiress sighed despairingly.

"I cannot tell; I cannot even imagine. In general misery, I should think. The dowager will never be happy again."

"I do not think she deserves to be," remarked Violet, quickly.

"Perhaps not; but we must make allowances for her wounded pride and her bitter disappointment. Her whole heart was fixed on her son. Then it is terribly sad for him. His mother wept bitterly one morning because he would have no son to succeed him. The titles and estates both go to people who are almost strangers."

Violet had never thought of that; all through the matter she had thought more of herself than of him.

"There could be no more cruel blow for a woman like the dowager than that," said Miss Marr, "and there can be little consolation for her; it is her own fault. The person who will suffer least will be the young wife herself. She will return to her own class and her own people, and probably forget all the havoc and misery she has caused. I am not hard-hearted, but I do detest her. I should have loved her if she had stood bravely by him."

"He did not stand bravely by her, it seems to me," commented Violet. "Why did he allow his mother to do such a cruel and wicked thing?"

"I do not think he did allow her. I feel sure she did it entirely without his knowledge. I look at the common sense of the matter—if he loved her well enough to give up all the world for her, why should he wish or try to find out a flaw in his marriage? I do not believe that he knew his mother had written."

"It seems to me," said Violet, "that the blame lies wholly with the dowager Lady Ryvers."

"Quite as much rests with the wife," declared Miss Marr. "She left him very easily. It did not seem to cause her any pain; that was what his mother and sisters felt. After all his sacrifices for her, it was a poor return. She really seemed glad of an excuse to get away. If she had quarreled with his mother, no one could have felt any surprise; but I cannot see why she left him."

This was how they judged her—they thought she cared little for him, little for her marriage-vows; no one knew that the dowager had stabbed her to the heart by telling her that her husband was aware that she had written.

"It is a miserable story," she said; "there does not seem to be a glimpse of happiness in it anywhere."

"No. Love is a marvelous thing," remarked the heiress. "I have often read that love wins love; it is not true. I loved Lord Ryvers well enough to have won love in return; but it never came. It would all have been so different if he had loved me;" and the girl stretched out her arms with wistful, passionate longing that went to Violet's heart.

Violet turned away, still holding the locket in her hand.

"How will it end?" she asked herself. "How can it end?" And she could read in the future no answer to the self-put question.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I WONDER," said Miss Marr, suddenly, "why I have opened my heart to you, Miss Beaton? I have not told this trouble of mine to any one else. Lady Ryvers guessed it, but then she knows how it is. Grandmamma does not know. She wonders why I care for no lovers, why I refuse all offers, why the world is all a weariness to me. And it is a weariness. I am ashamed to say that 'my days are dreary.' I am young, and I have everything to make me happy; but happiness and I have parted forever. I am glad that I have told you; my heart feels lighter. I am impulsive, you will say; but my heart warmed to you the first moment I saw you."

Violet wondered whether she would have liked her at sight had she known who she was.

"Give me my locket," requested Miss Marr. "But tell me first, do you wonder at my loving that handsome face?"

"I do not," said Violet, frankly; "it is handsome enough to win love."

Violet, in her heart, longed to know if Randolph had given the portrait himself. The question trembled on her lips, but her sense of delicacy would not let her ask it. Miss Marr answered it quite unconsciously.

"The dowager gave me this photograph," she said—"indeed, I am afraid I asked her for it. He did not give it to me."

Violet felt a great sense of relief when she heard that.

"I wish he had," the heiress went on. "I should like to treasure something that he had given me. If he touched only the withered petal of a flower, it seemed clothed with new life to me. You seem surprised. You have never loved any one in that mad fashion, have you?"

"No; that I certainly never have," she replied.

And Miss Marr laughed a mirthless laugh that did not suit her youth or beauty.

From that hour they were the truest and warmest of friends.

They were talking one day on the usual theme, Lord Ryvers, when Violet, looking up with shy, sweet eyes at her companion, asked suddenly.

"What was the name of this young wife of his whom no one loved?"

"One did love her. Monica loved her. She was, I believe, devoted to her, but she never mentioned her. The dowager would not allow it. Monica told me that she believed her sister-in-law was far more sinned against than sinning. And, as for Lord Ryvers, he loved the very ground on which she stood. Lady Lester, the other sister, was simply indifferent. The dowager was the only one who actively disliked her, and she would not, as I have said, allow her name to be mentioned. I think she generally called her 'that girl.' I do not remember to have heard what her Christian name was."

During nearly all the hours they spent together they had but one subject of conversation, and it was Lord Ryvers.

They stood one morning on the brow of the hill watching the waterfall that dashed into the basin below. The heiress turned to her companion.

"Have you read," she asked, "that beautiful old story of the two lovers who were drowned by a royal decree?"

"I do not remember it," answered Violet.

"It impressed me," said Miss Marr, her dark eyes lingering on the white, leaping waters; "and, strange to say, I always think of it when I stand here. A great king sentenced a man to death. What do you think the death was, Violet? He was to be bound fast to the girl he had long loved, and they were to be thrown, alive, into the sea. The man was delighted with his death. Perhaps he had loved the girl long and hopelessly—I cannot say; but he welcomed his sentence. He declared the supreme moment of his life would be the last. I think—I know it is a vain, foolish thought—I cannot help it—I think often, when I stand here, that I should like the same fate."

Violet shuddered at the words.

"I do not call that love," she said; "it is infatuation."

"It is the truest of love," cried the heiress; "and the woman who cannot feel it does not understand even the nature of love."

In some vague way the picture took possession of Violet. She could see her tall, fair, handsome husband on the brow of the hill, the glint of the sunlight on his hair; she could see him with his arms clasped round this woman who loved

him so well; she could see them fall together over the brink, down through the seething, foaming water, undying love in the woman's eyes. A cry came from her lips, as of one in pain; and Miss Marr looked curiously at her.

"Of what are you thinking?" she asked.

And Violet, startled, answered truthfully:

"I was picturing the scene. I saw you go over the fall.*
The heiress laughed.

"I may some day," she remarked; "but Lord Ryvers will not be with me. It is strange that one woman should value so little what another would give her life for. I wish that either Lady Ryvers could see her husband with my eyes or that I could see him with hers."

Another morning they stood on the lawn at Queen's Elm feeding the robins. The heiress had been relating to her attentive listener some of the incidents of her late visit to Ryversdale. She added, suddenly:

"It is really a terrible thing for a grand old race like that to become extinct, all through a mistaken marriage."

Violet looked at her curiously.

"If you could rule destiny," she said, "if you could control circumstances, what would you do? Would you let the young wife drift away—die—and marry Lord Ryvers yourself; or would you like them to meet again and be happy together?"

"I have often asked my own heart that question," replied Miss Marr. "Whether I am a noble woman or not I cannot say; but mine is a noble love. I love him better than myself; I place his happiness higher than my own. He loves her; all his life is centered in her; he does not love me. So that he may have the highest happiness and the highest bliss he can ever know, I wish that they may meet again and be happy together."

"You are a noble woman!" cried Violet, involuntarily. "It is a thousand pities that Lord Ryvers did not love you."

"It may be all for the best; he will learn what indifference is like, which he would never have done had he married me!"

"I am not sure whether that is any advantage," said Violet.

"I have thought," continued Miss Marr, "that I would try to find this wife of his, and if I succeeded in doing so,

use all the eloquence I could command to persuade her to go to him and beg his pardon."

Violet looked up with flashing eyes.

"To do what?" she cried.

"To beg his pardon," repeated Miss Marr, with innocent unconsciousness.

"So far as I have followed the story," said Violet, "it seems to me rather that it is he who should beg her pardon."

"There I cannot agree with you," said the heiress. "I think she had cause for anger and annoyance, but nothing could justify her in leaving him; she ought to beg his pardon for that. I fear I shall never be so fortunate as to find her; but if ever I do, I shall try to persuade her to go to him and acknowledge the wrong she has done. My dear Miss Beaton, why are you looking at me with flashing eyes?"

"I am thinking," Violet replied, "what this unfortunate young wife would say if she heard you."

"If she were sensible, she would say I was right. I can understand her passion and her anger, but I cannot understand how she could talk of such nonsense as annulling her own marriage."

"The nonsense of those who want to annul it for her is far greater," said Violet.

And Miss Marr made no reply.

Violet could not forget what her friend had said, that the young wife should go to her husband and beg his pardon. She, who had always been queen and mistress, who had left him with a sense of injury, who had felt herself wounded and hurt, to beg his pardon! The idea was decidedly novel to her.

One evening the two ladies were seated in the drawing room. Mrs. Ingram had gone to her own room, for the night was chill. Outside a drizzling rain fell, and a cold wind blew; inside all was warmth and comfort. They were startled at times by the eerie sound of the ivy-branches tapping against the window panes.

"This room is the picture of comfort on a winter night," said Miss Marr. "I wonder why it is that we all love scarlet and crimson in winter?"

"Because they represent warmth," answered Violet.

After a minute's pause, Miss Marr sighed deeply.

"I should think one London house must be very dull," she said. "I cannot help picturing Lord Ryvers shut up by himself."

"You are always thinking of Lord Ryvers," remarked Violet, not knowing whether she was amused, sorry, or pleased.

"That is quite true; it is a habit of which I shall never now cure myself. I wish almost that I could. I cannot help grieving. I picture the bright handsome face all sad and worn, the light heart and high spirits, the noble, artistic fancies all drooping and dying. I have heard a great deal of pathos about deserted wives; there seems to me to be much more pathos in the idea of a deserted husband. If I could but pierce the distance and see him! If the same rain be falling in London, and the same chill wind blowing, he will be sitting there all alone, listening to the dreary sounds, his face hidden in his hands, tears probably very near his eyes, and he will be thinking of days that will never come back to him."

"Hush!" said Violet. "You make me feel sorry for him!"

She had never thought of him as lonely, or desolate, or sad at heart, but always as an aristocrat living in luxury. She had not realized yet that the greatest hunger of all is hunger of the heart. Still from that hour the tender pity born of love lived in her heart for him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"I do not know whether it is my conscience or my heart that is awakening," thought Violet to herself; "but I am not even so happy as I used to be."

She was not. Her education and training had been so different from that of other girls; she had never talked of love and lovers. She had been brought up to think of love as something rather to be despised than esteemed. For the first time in her life she was brought into contact with a passionately loving woman; for the first time in her life she heard a woman speak of love. She had discovered what love was like to a woman. No matter how deeply a man loves, he cannot say much about it, he speaks but little; a woman has her love always on her lips, as she has it always living and burning in her heart.

Violet might have lived and died without knowing her own powers of loving, had not Miss Marr, with her passion and eloquence, brought them to life; and now she was beginning to realize a truth that puzzled her. She was rapidly falling in love with her husband after a fashion in which she had never loved yet. During that wooing in the summer woods of St. Byno's, the love had been rather on his side than hers. She had fallen in some degree under the glamour of it. The wooing of the handsome young artist had been a pleasant novelty. When she married him, she did not know that there was a higher, deeper, truer love than that which she felt for him. Now she was beginning to understand that she had not really loved him. She knew it by the difference in her own feeling toward him. She had heard his loving words with pleasure, but her heart had not beaten the more quickly for them. She had taken his caresses as a matter of course; she had accepted all the love, the homage, and devotion that he lavished on her without thinking anything of it. She had never understood what jealousy meant. As for being jealous of her husband, she would have laughed the idea to scorn. Now it was a different matter. Her heart beat with a new passion, a new pleasure, a new pain. She stood face to face with a great truth at last. She loved her husband—loved him with a love quite new to her, that had been called into existence by the devotion, the passion, the eloquence of another woman.

She hardly admitted to herself that she missed him, but she did. He had cared for her so tenderly that the wind had hardly been allowed to touch her face; now she found the difference. There was no one to take care of her; but she herself had to take care of others. No one knew or cared if she was out in the cold or the damp, if she felt ill or well, if she was blithe or sad; no loving eyes followed her going out and coming in, no loving words greeted her. She found the difference between being a beloved wife and a paid companion. If she felt tired, no one pitied her. She could not help remembering the days abroad, the balconies laden with flowers which hung over the blue moonlit sea; if she was tired then, loving arms folded her, her head was pillow'd on a loving breast, every comfort and luxury were found for her. Now Mrs. Ingram, although always polite, looked annoyed if her companion

THORNS AND ORANGE-BLOSSOMS.

seemed tired ; and of late she had not felt well. The first time that Violet stretched out her arms with a weary cry of "Oh, Randolph, how I miss you !" her husband was nearer to her heart than he had ever been before.

Still she had annulled her own marriage ; and there was an end of it. She was concerned about her health. She was so far from well that the least exertion seemed to tire her ; she had no strength, no spirits. When she looked in the mirror, she saw a pale face with woful eyes full of shadows, all the brightness gone. She asked herself anxiously, Was she ill ? Was she going to die ? Her death would clear away all troubles. If she were dead, mother and son would be reconciled, and Randolph would marry Miss Marr.

But the thought of it, instead of giving her a comfortable sense of resignation, flushed her face with anger. It was one thing to say to herself proudly that she would annul her marriage ; it was quite another matter to please them all, like a good Christian, by dying, and leaving her husband to the woman who loved him. No, she would not do that if she could possibly avoid it. She would do her best to keep strong and well. Hitherto she had enjoyed robust health : she had been so active and vigorous that she could not understand the languor and depression that seemed never to leave her now. She had never thought much of death. She knew in a vague fashion that she must die some day, but it seemed very far off to her in the bloom and spring-tide of health.

She was watching the November moon one night and she began to wonder whether, if she were to die, she would feel quite satisfied with herself—whether she would feel that she had done her best or not—whether, as she lay dying, she would long for Randolph, cry out for Randolph—whether she would long to die with her head on his breast and his arms around her. She felt that death in such a fashion would be sweet—ah, sweeter far than life without him ! The moon was rising above the trees, the silent night-scene lay outspread before her. Her heart ached with its own sense of desolation and sorrow. She held out her arms with a gesture of anguish.

"How blind, how mad I have been, Randolph," she cried—"for I have loved you all the time with a great love, but I did not know it!"

Surely under that November moon there was no one so desolate, no young face so sad, no young heart so heavy. She wept as she had never wept before. That night seemed to bring a crisis in her life. She stood face to face with a strong passion and a terrible despair. She could never go back to her husband—that was certain. She had left him of her own accord, and she could never return.

The black curtain of despair seemed to fall over her. All at once the great love and great mistake of her life appeared to her in clear colors. She had put herself out of his life; she had separated herself from him; and she must abide by the consequences.

"Of what could I have been thinking?" she asked herself. She had, as it were, seen his face in the glass held by the fair hands of another woman, and its beauty dazzled her.

She knew that, if she went to him, he would forgive her—he had never refused a wish of hers in his life; but her pride could not bend or lend itself to that. She would abide by what she had done. Even if she could have brooked asking him to take her back, she would never meet the dowager Lady Ryvers again. She had solemnly vowed never to re-enter Ryversdale until the dowager herself asked her to do so.

The new-born love for her husband struggled in her heart with pride, and pride gained the victory. She would not give in, whatever she had to bear; she would suffer in silence, die if needs must be, but never go back, never yield so sweet a triumph to Lady Ryvers as to be seen, humbled and contrite, asking for her husband's love again. She had never thought to weep as she wept now, never thought to feel that longing for him which she felt now. She said to herself over and over again that she must be mean and dishonorable. Her husband had done all he could to win her love, and yet it had never seemed really to wake in her heart until jealousy aroused it. What love, devotion, and untiring affection had failed to do, jealousy had done. "I am not a very noble woman," she confessed.

The clouds that had passed over the face of the moon seemed to her a type of the clouds that passed over her own soul. She wished that she had more love or more pride,

that she could humble herself to go to her husband, or that she could forget him.

The memory of all his goodness to her swept over her heart like a whirlwind. How little she had thought of it at the time—how little she had valued it! Oh, for one touch of that kind hand now, for one kiss from those loving lips!

CHAPTER L.

THE reign of King Frost had begun; silvery fringes hung from the trees and hedges. The robin-redbreasts outside the windows were waiting to be fed, and Miss Marr stood watching them. She had read her letters, and there was a look of determination on her face, when Violet, looking very pale and ill, came into the room. The heiress uttered a little cry of dismay when she saw her.

"Miss Beaton, you are really ill, I am sure!" she exclaimed. "You should see a doctor. You have not been well for some time."

And in her heart Violet knew it was true.

"I have been making up my mind to a vigorous course of action," continued Miss Marr—"most vigorous. Are you well enough to listen?"

"Yes," said Violet; but her heart contracted with a sudden sense of coming evil.

"I have had a long letter from the dowager Lady Ryvers this morning," said Miss Marr, "and she begs me to go to see her. She has gone to her own estate, Athelstone—she was an Alton by birth, and very proud she is of the name—and Monica is with her. She wants me to spend Christmas with them. I think I shall go. I have an object in going," she continued. "I shall make a most desperate effort."

"In what direction?" asked Violet. She tried to smile as she spoke, but her lips were white and trembling.

"I shall try to reconcile mother and son," replied the heiress. "I am quite sure that they are both unhappy; they must be; they have never been at variance in their life before. The dowager seems perfectly wretched; she says that life has lost all its charm for her, that she misses her son more than words can tell, and she begs me to come,

so that together we may contrive to bring about a different state of things."

No comment came from Violet. A "different state of things" must mean something that would affect her.

"I wish," said Miss Marr, thoughtfully, "that I could find that foolish young wife of his, and bring about a general reconciliation. That is impossible," she added, with a sigh; "but I think I shall be able to do something."

"Will Lord Ryvers be there?" asked Violet.

"I shall take a bold step, I think, and ask him to meet me there. You see, they are my dearest friends. I love them all—the handsome, chivalrous son, the stately mother, the placid Countess of Lester, and bright loving Monica. I love them all so well that I take the greatest possible interest in them. I would do anything to see them all happy together as they were before this unfortunate girl came amongst them—Lady Ryvers was a proud, happy mother, and Randolph a most devoted son. I wonder what I could do?"

"It seems a very hopeless state of affairs," said Violet. "I do not see what any one can do."

"Nor I, at present; but I am determined to do something. Loving them gives me the right of interfering. I shall ask Lord Ryvers to meet me at Athelstone."

"Will he come, do you think?" asked Violet.

"I hope so. He said he would not look upon his mother's face again, until he had found his wife, but I shall try my best to induce him to come."

"What can you do with him there? What is the use of it?"

"If I can only reconcile mother and son, it will be something," said Miss Marr. "Of course in the marriage question I cannot interfere; but I love the dowager Lady Ryvers, and I do not like to think of her as unhappy."

"What a pity it is," remarked Violet, with a great bitter sigh, "that Lord Ryvers did not marry you!"

"So I think," returned the heiress. "Men very seldom marry the right women, I believe. He has not done so, but he has paid a heavy price for his mistake. I think I shall go to Athelstone to-day, Miss Beaton. The only regret I have is not leaving you in better health."

"I shall soon be well, I hope," said Violet.

But there was a wistful, frightened look in her eyes that startled Miss Marr. She took Violet's hand in her own.

"Miss Beaton," she said gently, "are you in trouble? You have been so kind, so full of sympathy for me; you have listened so patiently to all my long stories. If you have any trouble of your own, tell it now to me."

"I have no trouble in which any human being can help me," Violet declared. "I have a trouble known only to Heaven."

Ah, what a tangled web of fate she held in her hands! It seemed to Violet in that moment that Miss Marr was the only person who could help her; yet, if the beautiful heiress knew that she was Lord Ryvers' wife, she would probably detest her.

"We shall have a brilliant Christmas, no doubt," said Miss Marr. "The dowager Lady Ryvers is not one of those who parade their sorrows before the world. I do hope Lord Ryvers will come. Bad as things are, there is no use in mother and son quarreling and keeping apart, both wretched."

"No," replied Violet; "there is no sense in that."

"I shall go to-day," repeated Miss Marr. "I have been some time with grandmamma. She will be quite happy with you. But, my dear Miss Beaton, are you quite sure that I can do nothing to help you? You have been a good friend to me; I should like to help you, if it be possible. I wish I were leaving you with more color in your face, with a light in your eyes. I shall think of you with great anxiety."

She could not understand the look, half wistful, half fearful, of Violet's eyes, for she had no key to what was passing in her mind.

"I never make many protestations," continued the heiress; "but I do say this to you, Miss Beaton, that I like you better than any woman I ever met. There is the charm of originality about you."

"You make me very happy by saying so," answered Violet. In her heart there was a wild cry of wonder as to whether she would like her if she knew who she was.

"Come with me to my room," said Miss Marr—"I like to superintend my own packing. I will finish what I was about to say, though. Let us make a compact of friendship, Miss Beaton. Let us be friends always."

" You are a rich heiress, and I a poor paid companion. Is it possible, do you think ? " asked Violet gravely.

" We are both women," cried Miss Marr, " and we care much for each other ! Why do you hesitate in giving me that promise ? " She looked not only surprised, but hurt.

Violet laid her hand on her companion's arm.

" I do promise," she said, " to be your most loyal and faithful friend, so far as our different circumstances will permit. I wonder if you will ever repent having asked me this ? "

" No," said the heiress, kissing the pale, sweet face so wistfully raised to her own, " I am sure I never shall. What a fanciful girl you are ! "

" No, it is not fancy. I know all your life; you have told it all to me. I know your secret—your love-story ; and you know nothing of me—less than nothing. I too have a story ; you have not heard it. I have a secret—you do not know it." Her eyes were full of tears ; her face quivered with emotion.

" I do not wish to know it," said Miss Marr. " I love you for your beautiful face, which charms me, for your independence and originality, for your noble ideas and the harmony I find in your character, tastes, and sentiments. Most of all," she added, with a smile, " I think that I love you because I have trusted you."

" That is very likely," answered Violet, simply. " You will find me faithful and loyal ; but I am afraid I can never be of any use to you."

" I am the best judge of that," said her companion. " You have been of the greatest use to me, as you express it. How patiently you have listened to all my love troubles ! "

" They interested me," replied Violet. " I should like to add one thing more. If ever, in the future, you should hear anything of me that surprises or displeases you, you will remember it was the knowledge of what is in my own heart which made me hesitate to promise what you asked me."

" My dear, one need look no further than your face," said the heiress, laughing ; " your whole soul shines there ; and it is a very honest soul, loyal, sweet, and pure. Now that we are friends, I shall write to you and tell you how my mission fares. Come with me now."

The two women who could never be thoroughly happy because of each other went to Miss Marr's room, where the onerous business of packing was to be performed. There were such treasures laid out there—lace, velvet, brocades, jeweled fans, ornaments of every kind, suits of shining gems—that Violet was bewildered. The heiress laughed at her amazed face.

"The paraphernalia of a professional beauty," she said.

In vain did the wealthy heiress offer Violet one thing after another. She would have lavished gifts upon her, she would have given her the richest lace, the most costly jewels; but Violet would accept nothing. She felt slightly embarrassed when she remembered the treasures shut up in her wardrobes at Ryversdale—nothing like those belonging to the heiress, but beautiful enough in their way.

She marveled at Miss Marr's continual reference to Lord Ryvers; she seemed to have no other thought. She took up a beautiful bracelet and said :

"I wore this when I met Lord Ryvers at the French Embassy."

Her white fingers seemed to caress a rich piece of lace, as she said :

"Lord Ryvers admired this."

She lingered lovingly over one of her dresses, and said :

"The first time I wore this I danced twice with Lord Ryvers."

At last Violet could stand it no longer. She looked up at the loving, impetuous woman.

"It is all Lord Ryvers," she cried, impatiently; "you think of nothing else, you speak of nothing else; every incident in your life seems to have taken its coloring from him."

"You are right," said Gwendoline. "Indeed, it is a worse case than that. My life takes its light and darkness from him, but it is almost always dark."

In Violet's heart the flame of jealousy burned so fiercely that she could have stamped on the laces and jewels that had been worn to charm him. There was a curious ring of suppressed passion in her voice as she said :

"It seems a great pity to waste so much love."

Miss Marr seemed slightly surprised.

"Longfellow says that love is never wasted. Do you know those beautiful lines :

"Talk not of wasted affection,
Affection never was wasted'?"

"Yes; I know them. But not even Longfellow will change my opinion that it is a sad, pitiful waste of love."

"I would rather waste it on Lord Ryvers than receive the fullest return from another," cried the heiress, passionately.

And Violet had to use more self-control than she had ever used in her life before to keep back the hot, angry words that rose to her lips.

CHAPTER LI.

DR. WEALD looked considerably astonished when he saw his young patient. He was a man of great experience and kindly heart. He had three fair young daughters of his own, and he thought of them as he looked at the delicate, exquisite, unconscious face.

"What name did you say?" he inquired of the housekeeper, who took him to the young lady's room.

"Miss Beaton," she replied.

"Miss Beaton?" repeated the doctor, with some emphasis.

"Yes, sir; she is quite a young lady—unmarried."

"Then there is a mystery," sighed the doctor, as he proceeded to examine his patient. "It is nothing to be alarmed at—it is only a long swoon," he said to the housekeeper, who, at the sight of the white, silent face, had cried out that she was dead. "A few simple remedies, and she will be all right."

He sent for all that he required. The housekeeper assisted him, and Violet soon showed some signs of consciousness; but there was a puzzled look about the doctor's face as he bent over her, an anxious look in his eyes. More than once his thoughts traveled back to the three fair young girls at home, and he murmured words to himself which might have been a prayer.

"There," he cried, when the blue wondering eyes opened—"that is better; that is right!"

He thought Violet, as she sat up, the loveliest girl he had ever seen. The golden hair had fallen over her shoulders, and on her beautiful face was the pathetic wonder of a child.

"Have I been dead and come back to life?" she asked, in a strangely startled voice.

"No," replied the doctor; "it has not been quite so bad as that."

"Where have I been?" she said. "It seems to me as though I fell and died."

"There is no coming back from death," answered Dr. Weald, solemnly. "You have had a very long and very exhausting fainting-fit. You must be very quiet, and try to regain your strength."

A fainting-fit? It must have been a curious one. A soft languor seemed to overcome her, and she sank back again upon the pillows.

"You will soon be well," he added, cheerfully.

But the expression of his face was at variance with his words. He seemed ill at ease. He bent over his beautiful young patient, and then, after a few words, walked away hurriedly. He stood for a few minutes looking from the window, then returned to her.

He wandered away again. He, the man of wide experience, of great and varied knowledge, a man who had never made a mistake, stood now confused and embarrassed, not knowing what to say to this girl whose eyes sought his face so anxiously.

"Doctor," she said, in a low, weak voice, "am I going to die?"

"I see no reason for thinking so," he replied.

"For a long time now," said Violet, "I have felt that I was going to die. Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure, humanly speaking," he replied.

"Then I must be very ill. It is long since I have felt well or strong. Why do you look at me so?"

With an impatient hand she pushed aside the thick waves of golden hair. The soft eyes looked piteously into his.

Bidding the housekeeper go to prepare something that he ordered, he drew nearer to his patient, but did not speak until the woman had disappeared and closed the door; then he bent over her.

"Are you quite yourself?" he asked. "Can you hear and follow my questions? Can you answer them?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Poor child!" he said to himself; and once more he thought of his fair young daughters at home.

Why, even when seated by her side, did he pause and hesitate, why in his heart beg from Heaven that he might make no mistake, that his skill might not fail nor his wisdom err?

He seemed strangely reluctant, but at last raised her white hand and looked at it earnestly—the left hand. Laying it down again gently, he said, slowly :

" You wear no wedding-ring."

Her startled face betrayed her, and told him that she understood. At his next words she shrunk back with a faint despairing cry. When he spoke again, she covered her face with her hands, and he heard her moan, " What shall I do? What can I do?"

" If you will trust me," he said, " I will help you."

" I cannot," she gasped. " There is nothing left for me but to die."

" You will not die," said the doctor. " Take heart. There is nothing so dreadful but that time and patience will help and overcome it."

" Is it really true?" she asked. " It cannot be. I am going to die, and you tell me this to bewilder me. It cannot be true!"

" It is most undoubtedly true," said the doctor.

" How blind and mad and foolish I have been!" she cried.

" I am right," said the doctor, looking at her with penetrating eyes. " No one could be deceived in a face like yours. I am right in my thoughts. You have worn a wedding-ring, and in a fit of either anger or jealousy you have removed it."

She looked at the white thin hand on which no wedding-ring shone.

" You are right," she replied. " I have annulled my own marriage."

He looked down on her with a kindly smile.

" My poor child," he said, pityingly, " what vain words! You say you have annulled it, while Heaven has confirmed it more strongly than ever. Can you trust me?"

" No," she replied—" not here in this house, where I begin to believe the hand of Heaven has brought me. Of all places in the world, my lips are most tightly sealed here."

" Still you are sure of the fact that you are legally, formally, and validly married ? " he asked.

" I am the more sure of it," she answered, " because my —my husband's mother hated me, and tried to set my marriage aside. When I knew that, I said to myself that I would annul my own marriage ; and I have done so."

A faint smile played round the doctor's lips.

" When the tide of a restless sea is set floating," he said " no human power can stop it ; yet it would be easier to stem such a tide than to set aside or break the sacred tie of marriage when once it has been formed."

She listened with beating heart and white, trembling lips.

" Then why," she said, " should they try to set it aside ? "

" They could not. Child, do you think that men can undo the work of Heaven ? You see the proof of the utter futility of the idea. You thought to yourself that you would annul your own marriage, while Heaven has confirmed it. I am an old man, with daughters young and fair as you. I do not wish to pry into your secrets, nor do I ask your confidence. I thank Heaven for you that you have a right to wear a wedding-ring. For your own sake I counsel you most strongly to put it on at once ; and I advise you to go down upon your knees and ask pardon from Heaven for having arrogated to yourself so much power, for having thought it possible that you could dissolve or annul your marriage. Then seek your husband, and ask him to take you back. I give you this advice from the depths of an honest heart."

But she fell to moaning that it was all too late, that she had left him forever, had bidden him an eternal farewell.

" Child," said the doctor, steadily, " why did you leave your husband ? What did he do ? Was he untrue to you ? Did he give his love, his cares, his attention to any one else ? "

" No," she replied earnestly ; " his fault was that he loved me too much. He—he deceived me in order to marry me, and my heart was sore and heavy on account of that deceit."

" Did that deceit hurt you in any way, remembering that all is fair in love and war ? "

" It did not hurt me," she replied. " The secret he kept from me was with respect to his wealth and position."

"And you resented it?" interrupted the doctor.

"I did—greatly. Then his mother hated me, and tried to make out that our marriage was not valid. Oh, what am I saying? In this house least of all, I should not have spoken. But you will not betray me, you will never say one word?"

"Seek your husband, child. If it be wounded love that stands between you, vanquish it; if it be wounded pride, trample it under foot; let nothing stand between your husband and you."

"You do not know!" she cried, wringing her hands.

"I may not know the details of your story," he said, impressively. "A different set of circumstances surrounds every individual, but grand and immortal truths never change. Take my advice. Seek your husband, seek a reconciliation with him!"

No; she would not be treated with scorn by his proud mother; she would not return to the husband who had known his mother's intentions, yet had not told her of them. And yet the newly-awakened love cried out that all this was less than nothing compared with the bliss of being with him again.

"I am tortured," she said.

"I know it; I read it in your face. Do right, child—never mind the result; do right, come what may. Now I must leave you. You are still very weak and ill; be careful, and keep quiet. Calm your mind, your soul, your conscience, and all will be well. I shall drive over again this evening to see you."

"And you are quite sure that it is true?" she repeated.

"I am quite sure," he replied. "I will keep your secret; but I am quite sure. When I return this evening, we will talk over what will be the best for you to do; until then good-by."

But the doctor never saw the face of his beautiful patient again.

CHAPTER LII.

DR. WEALD saw the housekeeper. He assured her ~~that~~ there was nothing to fear; the young lady wanted rest and nourishment. He would return in the evening and see how she was. He sent a message to Mrs. Ingram to say that,

there was no need for anxiety ; but he went home with a grave face and a sad heart. Who was she, this beautiful, winsome, helpless girl ? How had she drifted into the old-fashioned mansion of Queen's Elm ? She was not related to the Ingram family. He knew every member of it ; he had attended them for many years. He could not understand why she had said that she must not speak in that house above all others. She was no relative, no friend, simply the companion whom every one knew Mrs. Ingram had engaged to amuse and attend her.

There was a mystery. He could not make it out. Only one thing was plain to him, and that was that she must be persuaded to go back to her husband. He thought to himself, with an indulgent smile, that she was most probably a spoilt child who had run away from home in some sudden pique, and was hiding under the disguise of a lady's companion. He had come across one or two romances in the course of his professional career ; this was another, with certainly the fairest heroine man ever dreamed of. The good doctor promised himself that he would go back to her that evening, that he would persuade her to trust him, to tell him her story, to let him act for her. He was deeply interested in her, as is the nature of man to be deeply interested in a beautiful woman ; he would not rest until he saw her happy and reconciled to her husband. He felt grieved for her, there in her loneliness, with no friend or companion, no one in whom to trust or confide.

" But I will make it all right this evening," he said to himself.

While Violet, left to herself, went almost mad from excess of emotion. The doctor had left a sleeping-draught, which he said was to be given to her at once ; but all the sedatives ever thought or dreamed of would not have brought rest to her. Was it joy or despair ? Was it pleasure or pain ? Was it wonder ? Was it regret ? She sprang from the bed. The faintness and the languor had disappeared under the stimulus of what she had heard ; a burning fever seemed to course through her veins ; yet her face was white and her hands were cold as death ; her eyes were aflame, her lips quivering. She knelt first with a frantic cry to Heaven ; then she rose with a wail of pain, and paced the room.

" What shall I do ? What must I do ? " was the burden

of her cry. Then a feverish longing to go away seized her. "I cannot stay here," she said; "I must go away." Then a fresh longing came to her, it was to lie down on the pretty white bed and never open her eyes again.

For the news the doctor had told her was startling enough. In a few months she would be the mother of a little child, and she did not know whether to rejoice or to grieve. If she had been living at peace and in union with her husband, her happiness would have been without bounds or limit; but she had left him, and had annulled her own marriage. If it should please Heaven to bless her with a little son, he would be Baron Ryvers of Ryverswell. How could she persist in hating the aristocracy when, if Heaven did send her a son, he would be an aristocrat?

What would Randolph say? She remembered his great love for children, and how often he had said to her that his one fervent prayer was that Heaven would bless him with a son. Once, as they were standing on the bridge at Salzburg, watching the fast-flowing river, he had said to her quite suddenly:

"Violet, if ever Heaven blesses us with a son, I shall call him 'Byno,' in remembrance of the dear old woods where I first met you."

She had laughed carelessly at the time. Now the words came back to her and pierced her heart.

If Randolph knew—he who had always been so kind to her—how devotedly he would tend her! But he did not know, and most probably was with Miss Marr. No; that must never be now. Suddenly Randolph seemed to have grown doubly dear to her. Then the difficulty of her position dawned upon her. What was she to do? Of all houses in the world, her secret must never be known here. She must go at once. Gradually all other thoughts and ideas resolved themselves into the decision that she must leave Queen's Elm. When the doctor returned that evening, she must not be there; she must go at once, and leave no trace, no address behind her. To her bewildered mind this one thing was clear. She dressed herself and rang for the housekeeper.

"Do you want to kill yourself, Miss Beaton," asked the astonished woman, "by going out after such an illness?"

"No; but I must go. I am not going out merely for a stroll. I am leaving Queen's Elm never to return."

"It is madness," said the housekeeper, "and most probably will terminate in death."

"I cannot help it," cried Violet. "Do not oppose me. I have made up my mind to go, and nothing will induce me to stay."

"Well, I enter my protest," said the housekeeper. "Two hours since we all thought you were dying; now you are going out. Why, you have hardly strength to walk, Miss Beaton!"

"I shall be better soon. I cannot stay here. I am going to see Mrs. Ingram. See that the carriage is ready. I must be at the station by four."

Violet had decided on going to London, not knowing where else to go.

Mrs. Ingram looked much astonished when Violet stood before her.

"Do not be alarmed," she said. "I wish I had more time that I might speak more fully to you."

Mrs. Ingram roused herself and looked into the lovely, colorless face.

"I hope I shall not startle you," pursued Violet; and there was a ring of impatience in her voice. "I am sorry to tell you that I am obliged to leave Queen's Elm to-day. I am afraid it will be a great inconvenience; but I am compelled to go."

"It is very sudden, very unexpected, my dear," said the stately, gentle old lady, "but of course, if you cannot help it—"

"I cannot, I cannot!" cried Violet. "I am in great trouble—I must go!"

"I have known it ever since you went with me to my husband's grave," said Mrs. Ingram, quietly. "Only tell me how, and I will do all I can to help you."

"You are very good," returned Violet; "but you could not do anything for me. I am sorry to leave you; you have been very kind to me."

"Go then, my dear. Do not be anxious about me. I shall find some one to take your place. I am sorry you are going; you are a great favorite of mine, and I shall miss you very much; but if it is urgent that you should go, I will make no effort to detain you. When are you going?"

"I want to catch the four o'clock express to London," replied Violet.

"Then you have but little time to spare," said Mrs. Ingram. "You must have something to eat before you start. Shall you come back to me?"

Violet fell upon her knees by the old lady's side, and took the thin, withered hand in hers.

"I am sorry to seem ungrateful and unkind," she said. "No; I shall never come back. I am in great trouble, and I do not see the end of it. I grieve to leave you in this fashion, but I cannot help it."

"I always thought from your face that you had a story," remarked the old lady. "I knew it when you were with me at my husband's grave."

Before they parted, Mrs. Ingram made Violet promise that she would not forget her, that she would come back to see her at some time or other.

"I have had many companions," she said, "since my laughter, my bonny Jean, died, but none that I have liked so well as you."

An hour afterward Violet found herself in the express, speeding as fast as steam could take her to London. She had not thought yet what she should do when she reached there; her only idea had been to hasten away from Queen's Elm. As the train sped rapidly onward through the fast-falling shades of evening, her mind grew calmer, and once more she was able to think.

Mrs. Carstone was the best friend she had in the world. She had thought once of appealing to her aunt in her distress; but she knew that that good lady would say things of her husband that she herself could not and would not tolerate. She liked Miss Marr; but in this case it was impossible to make her her confidante.

So she made up her mind that she would send for Mrs. Carstone, tell her all, and hear what her advice was. She would abide by it, let it be what it might. When she reached London, she took a cab to the Great Northern Hotel, and from there she telegraphed to Mrs. Carstone, asking her if she would come to see her there at once.

The answer to her telegram soon arrived, telling her that Mrs. Carstone would be with her in the morning. After that Violet slept well, her mind being at rest. Mrs. Carstone was not a particularly clever woman; but she had a good judgment and a kindly heart. Some way out of the difficulty would present itself to her.

CHAPTER LIII.

MRS. CARSTONE wept tears of genuine delight at the unexpected news.

"It is a gift from Heaven," she cried, "sent to reconcile you and your husband—a gift from Heaven direct, my dear; and I am thankful for your sake. And now what have you thought of doing?"

"I thought of laying all my cares and troubles on your shoulders for a time," answered Violet. "Whatever advice you give me, I will follow it."

"I should say, seek a reconciliation first with your husband," said Mrs. Carstone. "That was the course I advised even before I knew of this. You can do nothing better. I have a few days to spare; I will stay with you. Write to your husband. Do not tell him your news—that will be an agreeable surprise to him—but tell him you are tired of wrong-doing, and ask him to be friends. I should use just that simple expression, 'Be friends.'"

"I can not call it 'wrong-doing,'" remarked Violet, "because I really thought I was doing right."

"We will not argue over a word," said Mrs. Carstone. "Tell him that you are tired of being away from him, and want to be friends—that is the first thing to be done—and I will stay with you till the answer comes."

"I do not know where he is," she said. "I heard that he was living somewhere in London."

She remembered that Miss Marr had told her that he was living alone, dejected and miserable, in London; but she had told her also of her intention to draw him, if possible, to Athelstone. Athelstone was the Dowager Lady Ryvers's own house, whither she had gone after her quarrel with her son. He might be in London, or he might have gone to Athelstone.

"Send your letter to Ryverswell, and, no matter where Lord Ryvers has gone, it will be safely forwarded to him," Mrs. Carstone advised.

"If I do it at all," said Violet, "I must do it at once, while there is a rush of feeling in my heart which prevents me from thinking clearly or remembering bitterly. I must forget much before I can write that letter, and in this confusion I have forgotten much."

"So much the better," remarked Mrs. Carstone, briskly.
"This is the very time."

She rang quickly, and ordered writing materials to be brought into the room. She would not delay, lest Violet should change her mind. The beautiful face of the young wife had grown very pale, and Mrs. Carstone saw how her hands trembled.

"Write, now," she said, as she placed the pen in Violet's hand.

And she wrote the simple words :

"I am tired of being away from you, Randolph. Will you be friends? I am remaining at the Great Northern Hotel until I receive your answer."

As she sealed and stamped it, a great burning blush covered her face. So this was the end of her grand resolutions, her high spirit, her rebellion, her "internal farewell"! She winced as she thought of it. Mrs. Carstone read her feelings.

"Remember," she said, "it is for your child's sake. You may, if you have a very elastic conscience, order your own life as you will; but you cannot blight the life of your child. Give me the letter, and let it be posted at once."

Again she rang. She placed the letter in the servant's hands, saying :

"Let this be sent at once to the post, and see that a trustworthy messenger takes it, as it is of great importance."

Violet wondered in her own mind whether Miss Marr would be with Randolph when he received it, looking at him with those dark, loving eyes of hers? Would his handsome, eager face flush with pleasure or grow pale with anger as he read? She could not say. She knew that he had loved her with all his heart; but she was uncertain as to whether or how far her anger and her caprice had interfered with that love.

"I am glad I had not much time to think about it," she said, with a deep sigh. "I am quite sure, if I had been able to remember all the reasons that induced me to leave him, I could not have written it."

While good Mrs. Carstone sat sipping her favorite after-dinner wine, the beautiful young wife lay with a dreamy

smile on her lips. She need never be jealous of Miss Marr again. She was happier than she had been since the discovery she had made of her husband's title and wealth. It would not be so bad, after all, to be called "young Lady Ryvers," the mother of the future heir of Ryversdale; it would not be so bad to enjoy money and rank; it would all be sweetened with love.

"Love will waken by and by."

Love had awakened with a passionate rush.

"Oh, my husband," cried the girl, who had once thought love a trouble, and had talked of annulling her own marriage, "if I could see you now, if I could tell you how full of love my heart is for you!"

Some one was singing in the next room—a girl with a soft, clear voice—and Violet lay listening. Noiselessly Mrs. Carstone rose to open the door, so that they should not lose one word, and the sweet, girlish voice sang on.

"I know not when the day may be,
I know not when our eyes may meet,
What welcome you may give to me,
Or will your words be sad or sweet
It may not be till years have passed,
Till eyes are dim and tresses gray;
The world is wide, but, love, at last
Our hands, our hearts, must meet some day.
Some day I shall meet you,
Love—I know not when or how;
Only this, that once you loved me—
Only this, I love you now."

"I know not are you far or near,
Or are you dead, or do you live;
I know not who the blame should bear,
Or who should plead, or who forgive.
But, when we meet at length some day,
Eyes clearer grown the truth may see,
And ev'ry cloud shall roll away
That darkens, love, 'twixt you and me.
Some day I shall meet you,
Love—I know not when or how;
Only this, that once you loved me—
Only this, I love you now."

The beautiful melody died away; but the words of the song had entered Violet's heart. It had needed but this

to fill her whole soul with unutterable longing for her husband, longing so great that it was almost pain. Tears filled her eyes, and Mrs. Carstone crossed the room to her quietly to kiss them away.

"You must not agitate yourself," she whispered.

A strange coincidence happened that same evening. Although tired, Violet knew she should not sleep, and she asked for some books. Amongst others there was sent to her a volume of extracts; and the first lines upon which her eyes fell were these :

"Marriage, rightly understood,
Gives to the tender and the good
A paradise below."

They struck her with strange force. Had she voluntarily deserted an earthly paradise? Ah, let her but once return, let her but once more stand in the safe shelter of her husband's arms, and she would be all that he could wish, she would love him with her whole heart and soul! Peer or peasant, noble or plebeian, mattered little now; she loved him.

CHAPTER LIV.

Two days had passed, and no answer had come to Violet's letter. It was the third day now, and the young wife's heart misgave her. Within three days, she and Mrs. Carstone had argued, a letter must reach any part of England. In the first flush of sanguine hope she had felt quite sure that the moment Randolph read her letter he would hasten to her. She had expected him every hour, every minute; every footstep on the stairs, every hand on the handle of the door, she had believed to be his. She had started a hundred times each day, her face flushing, her heart beating fast, a faint cry on her lips, which turned always into a wail of disappointment.

It was the end of the third day. He would not come now; he was not in such a great hurry to see her, after all. And no wonder, she owned to herself in sorrowful honesty —no wonder, after all her caprices and the scornful fashion in which she had treated his love. Once a terrible disappointment happened to her. A hansom dashed up to the grand entrance, and some one sprang from it in hot haste—

some one who looked up at the windows of the hotel as though he expected to see a beloved face there. For one moment her heart stood still. It was surely he—surely Randolph—come at last. But, as the face and figure drew nearer, they were strange to her. It was not Randolph. A horrible sense of dismay came to her—a horrible fear. What should she do if he never came and never wrote? That was impossible; he must write. In all their little misunderstandings he had ever been the first to yield. A smile, a glance, a word from her had always brought him to her feet. Was it likely that he could or would withstand such words as she had written—"Let us be friends"?

The dawn of the fourth day found her trembling between hope and despair. On the fifth day Mrs. Carstone's kindly heart failed her when she looked at the white worn face.

"My dear," she said, "you must not look so. Try to regain some of your indifference, some of your carelessness; your face is becoming quite drawn and haggard."

And Violet, clasping the friendly hands in her own, cried, in a voice that was pitiful to hear:

"I do not think my husband will answer my letter!"

Mrs. Carstone tried to comfort her with all the gentle soothing women use to each other in the hour of distress. It was possible, she urged, that the letter had not reached him. There was plenty of time yet. She must be patient, and, above all, she must remember how precious her life was.

On the sixth day Violet shut herself up in her room. She had resolved on sending another letter. This should be not a friendly invitation, but a passionate appeal to him to come to her. She would not ask him to be friends, but she would tell him how passionately she had learned to love him. She would not break her news to him; but she would beg him to forgive her for the old love's sake.

"Think of me," she wrote, "not as the proud, injured, haughty wife who bade you farewell, careless of your love and careless of your pain, but as the girl whom you wooed in the woods of St. Byno's. In those days, I frankly own, love was new to me, and I did not love you as you deserved; now it is different. Come back to me, Randolph, come back to me, darling, for I have learned at last to love you with my whole heart and soul, just as you loved me at

first. And, beloved, I shall wait here six days—six days. If, at the end of that time, I have not heard from you, I shall know that you will never either write to me or come to see me again, and life will be all over with me. But you will come, beloved, you will come! My heart longs for you. You will take me in your arms and kiss me, and lay my head upon your breast!"

She wrote the letter on her knees; she covered it with burning tears and passionate kisses. Then she carried it herself to the post. She put it into the letter-box, and, as it dropped from her fingers, turned to Mrs. Carstone with a smile more sad than any sigh.

"That will bring me either life or death," she said.

"It will be life, my dear," returned Mrs. Carstone. "No man who loved his wife could turn a deaf ear to such prayers as yours. You have promised to wait here six days. Let us spend those six days more sensibly than we have the last. Let us spend them in shopping. Have you money, my dear?"

And the answer was "Plenty," with a dreary sigh.

"You will want it all," said Mrs. Carstone, delighted to think how easily she could make up any little deficiency of that kind. "After writing that letter, you must rest to-day, and to-morrow we will go out shopping. Have you any idea what we shall buy?"

"No," replied Violet; but there was a flush on her face and a shy, sweet light in her eyes as she answered.

"Such marvels," said Mrs. Carstone—"such dainty marvels of lace and embroidery—little pretty things that will make your heart beat with joy! And do you know for whom they will be?"

"Oh, happy me!" sighed Violet, even as she smiled. "In spite of all my trouble, thrice happy me!"

"Thrice happy every good woman to whom Heaven sends the gift of a little child!" said Mrs. Carstone, with tears in her eyes. "You will have no time for watching at the windows for the postman; the next six days must be spent in making provision for the future Lord Ryvers."

So during the next six days the beautiful face regained some of its color and some of its calm; for Violet was taken out of herself by this new and keen delight, and Mrs. Carstone was just as pleased.

Violet roused herself from this new and engrossing occu-

pation to ask where her husband was. No letter had yet arrived; until the end of the sixth day Mrs. Carstone would not have the question discussed.

"He will come or write," she said. "It is not likely that, loving you as he does, he will refuse. If he did not intend to come, he would at least write and say so."

The fifth, sixth, seventh day came without news or letter; and then they knew they must look the cruel fact straight in the face.

"He will neither write nor come now," said Violet, with the calm of despair. "I cannot deceive myself or buoy myself up with false hopes any longer; he will not come."

"No," replied Mrs. Carstone; "I have been mistaken; he will not come."

The dainty purchases were all packed. There was no more shopping; they could remain no longer at the hotel.

"In ten days more," said Mrs. Carstone, regretfully, "I must leave you. My husband and son return from abroad, and I must join them. Will you come home with me?"

"No. I thank you with all my heart, but I could not do that. Think for me—I cannot think for myself; find some place for me where I can die."

"Die! What nonsense, my dear! Why should you die? 'Hope on, hope ever.' Let me think what it is best that I should do for you."

She thought for some time, while Violet knelt by her side with a white, despairing face. Suddenly Mrs. Carstone looked up.

"I know the very thing!" she cried. "I have an endless array of poor relatives, and my husband is very generous to them all. I have a cousin, Miss Mary Marston, by name, who lives in a pretty little house at Weston-on-Sea. I will take you there, and you shall stay with her until we can see more clearly what better we can do. You must do your best to gain health and strength. I can come there to see you very often."

"You are so good to me!" sobbed Violet with a sudden burst of tears.

So it was arranged. Nothing better could be done; and, on the day following, the two ladies left the Great Northern Hotel and went to the pretty little house at Weston-on-Sea.

Miss Marston received them with open arms; and Mrs

Carstone told what she thought necessary of Violet's history. Miss Marston promised to take the greatest care of the beautiful young lady. And there, within sound of the restless sea, Violet lived for many weeks. She never guessed the truth that the letters sent to Ryverswell had fallen into the hands of the dowager, who, feeling sure that Violet would write at some time or other, had ordered all letters sent to Ryverswell to be forwarded to Athelstone. Her son had been too wretched, too indifferent to give any directions with regard to his letters ; he did not expect any from Violet. The dowager opened both letters, read and burned them—then thanked Heaven that the danger was past, and hoped that the girl's word would come true, and that she would soon die.

One morning, Miss Marston, going into her lodger's room, found her lying with her face on the ground and a newspaper crushed in her cold, white hand.

CHAPTER LV.

THE fair sweet month of May, bringing its own fair crown of hawthorn—the fairest May that for many years had blessed the land. It came with smile of sun and song of birds and sweetest bloom of flowers. Over the land lay a veil of tender green, the sea shimmered beneath the glorious sun.

To one heart the sunlight, the song, and the flowers brought no joy, no happiness, no hope, nothing but the chill of despair. For the long weeks had passed without bringing to Violet any intelligence of or from her husband Mrs. Carstone had been several times to see her, and found her on each visit looking paler, more languid, and more ill, each time more hopeless.

"I shall never see him again," was the burden of her cry. "I must not blame him. It was all my fault. When I had his love, I did not value it ; now that I have lost it, I am dying for it. It is strange, loving me so dearly, that he shculd not have sent me one word."

"Do you think it possible that he may never have received the letters ?" asked her friend.

"No ; had there been any mistake in the address, they would have been returned to me. It is that he will not come ; I have tried him too far. It is best perhaps as it is."

I shall die, and he will be free to marry the girl his mother has chosen for him."

And Mrs. Carstone this time had no cheering words. She agreed with Violet that he had lost patience and cared no more for his wife. She was terribly anxious concerning Violet, for the girl had clung to her with kisses and tears, imploring her not to tell any one, either friend or foe, where she was, threatening that, if she did so, she would go where no one could follow her or find her; and Mrs. Carstone knew that she would keep her word, so that to neither husband nor son could she say one word.

"I am sure I shall die," Violet would say to her quite calmly, her woful eyes looking over the restful sea; "and then they will all be happy. I shall be out of the way, and no more trouble to them."

"But what if you do not die?" asks Mrs. Carstone, anxious to rouse her.

"You are a good woman," said Violet, "and Heaven hears the prayers of such. Pray for me that I may die!"

As she spoke she wrung her hands with a gesture of despair. She had given up hope. Once or twice she thought she would go home to Aunt Alice, and ask to die near the bonny woods of St. Byno's, where Randolph had first met her. As her strength decreased a terrible languor came over her. Her brain and mind were ever employed. In imagination she was always with Miss Marr and her husband. She was sure that they were together. The dowager's influence had prevailed; Randolph had learned to look upon her coldly, and almost forgotten her. Oh, welcome death that would take her from such a troubled life!

One morning she felt strangely ill and weak. She went down to her pretty little parlor, where breakfast was prepared for her. Lately a craving for news had possessed her, and she had ordered two or three fashionable journals, hoping to see her husband's name mentioned, hoping to find out where Miss Marr was. This morning she was rewarded, for one little item of fashionable news ran thus:

"The Earl and Countess of Princethorpe have been entertaining a large and select party of guests at Princethorpe Manor. Amongst the visitors were Lord and Lady Kintall, Miss Marr, Colonel Morton, and many others."

"Miss Marr," "Princethorpe Manor." She wrote the

words down, not knowing why, but in obedience to some unaccountable instinct. Presently she came to a paragraph that seemed to her her death-warrant.

"We understand that proceedings have been taken by the members of a noble and powerful family to set aside the marriage of the head of the house, under the plea that it was contracted while the young nobleman was a minor. The case is likely before long to occupy the attention of the gentlemen of the long robe."

It so happened that the paragraph referred to the marriage of the young Marquis of Connara, who had eloped with his mother's waiting-maid, and not to Randolph, Lord Ryvers. But to Violet's jealous heart it seemed as though every word was meant for him and for her. This was why her husband had not answered her letters or been to see her. He must be a consenting party to it, or it could not be done. They would annul her marriage, after all; yet she would be the mother of the heir of Ryverswell. Randolph would marry Miss Marr. There came to her disordered mind a vision; she saw her husband standing before the altar with the heiress, as he had stood with her, his fair and handsome face bent over her.

"He is mine, he is mine!" cried Violet; and then she fell with her face to the ground.

Miss Marston found her so, and her first proceeding was to telegraph for Mrs. Carstone, and her next to send for a doctor.

It was barely noon when Mrs. Carstone arrived.

"Tell me the worst!" she cried, when she saw Miss Marston's pale face.

"I found her lying in her room this morning, with her face to the ground, and the doctor fears the worst."

Pale and trembling, Mrs. Carstone sunk into the nearest chair.

"Let me see the doctor," she said, "before I see her."

But he only confirmed Miss Marston's words. Then Mrs. Carstone went up to Violet. A white face framed in golden hair lay upon the pillow, two beautiful eyes, shadowed with pain, looked at her wistfully as she entered, a white hand, thin and fragile, beckoned her.

"Ask him," she said, "if I shall see my baby before I die."

"You will not die, Violet," answered Mrs. Carstone; but none of the old hope shone in her face.

Not long afterward came the terrible struggle between life and death.

More than once they had bent forward, believing she was dead; but suddenly arose on the calm summer air a little cry, a faint, feeble, wailing cry, the sound of which brought a faint color to the white, beautiful face. Mrs. Carstone had never shed such tears in her life as those she shed when they placed the little heir of Ryverswell in her arms.

A faint whisper came from the white lips.

"Shall I see my baby before I die?"

"Can you not save her?" cried Mrs. Carstone. "It seems so horrible that she should die now!"

"Heaven may save her—I cannot," replied the doctor, more moved than he cared to show.

"How long have I to live?" asked the weak voice.
"Days or hours?"

"Hours, I fear," was the grave reply.

And then they placed the tiny child in the failing arms that clasped him with such unutterable love.

Violet did not think much of her husband in that hour of desperation and pain—only of the child, the little child she must leave.

"Can you not save me? Help me to live!" she gasped, with white lips.

It was--so the doctor said—merely a matter of hours. Who would take care of her child? She thought of Miss Marr, the noblest woman she knew in the world. Ah, yes! She should die more at peace, happier, if she knew that her child was with Miss Marr.

With difficulty she made Mrs. Carstone understand that she was to telegraph to Princethorpe Manor.

"Say that Violet Beaton wants her, and begs her to come at once. Shall I live," she asked, wistfully, "until she comes?"

"We will do our best for you," said the doctor; but he had no hope.

CHAPTER LVI.

MISS MARR obeyed the summons promptly, though she wondered greatly why Violet Beaton had telegraphed in so sudden and peremptory a manner for her.

Mrs. Carstone received her, and the two looked at each other curiously.

"I am Mrs. Carstone," said the millionaire's wife—"Mrs. Carstone of Ingleshaw," she added, with a faint hope that the glories of that most ancient place had reached the aristocratic ears of the lady before her.

But no gleam of recognition came into the proud face.

"It is I who telegraphed to you, Miss Marr," she continued. "The poor lady is dying, and her one wish was to see you."

"Dying?" cried the heiress, startled from her usual calm. "You do not mean to tell me that Violet Beaton is dying?"

"I fear so. The doctor says it is but a matter of hours; and I am sure she has sent for you because she wishes to leave the little child with you."

"The child! What do you mean?" cried Miss Marr.

"I speak of the child whose birth is to cost its mother's life. Miss Marr, there can be no more secrets now. Do you know who Violet Beaton is?"

"She is Violet Beaton, I presume. I know nothing more about her."

"She is Lady Ryvers!" cried Mrs. Carstone, with a burst of tears. "It is useless to keep her secret any longer. Lord Ryvers must know of the death of his wife and the birth of his son."

"Lady Ryvers!" cried the heiress. "Lady Ryvers! Do you mean that she is the wife of Randolph, Lord Ryvers?"

"I do. And the friends of Lord Ryvers have driven her to her death!"

But Miss Marr could not believe what she had heard.

"Pardon me," she said, "you are wrong. Violet Beaton has been living with a relative of mine. That is how I know her; that is why she has sent for me."

"I assure you, Miss Marr, that the young lady dying up stairs is Violet Beaton, who married Lord Ryvers. I have known her and her history for some time. It was with me she took refuge when she left Ryverswell."

"And who," cried the heiress, sinking pale and trembling upon the sofa, "did you say you are?"

"I am Mrs. Carstone of Ingleshaw," repeated the millionaire's wife.

A sudden gleam of recollection came to Miss Marr ; she had heard the name often enough.

"Your husband is the millionaire who bought Ingleshaw ?" she said.

And, in spite of the sorrow hanging over them, Mrs. Carstone's face was a picture of complacency as she answered "Yes."

But the heiress could hardly comprehend the other intelligence, that Violet Beaton was Lady Ryvers, the unhappy young wife who had left her husband.

"I have known and loved her," continued Mrs. Carstone, "ever since we met abroad. She came to me in her distress and despair when she left her husband ; or rather I met her by accident, and took her home with me. She would not remain, she would work for herself ; and a friend of mine found her an engagement with a Mrs. Ingram of Queen's Elm."

"That is my grandmother. I met her there ; I spent some weeks there with her." Suddenly Miss Marr remembered all that she had confided in her, how she had told her the story of her great love for Randolph, and how she intended to win him for herself, if she could. She stood dismayed, bewildered, tortured by the recollection. How little she had dreamed that she was speaking to Randolph's wife ! She clasped her hands with a bitter cry. "If she dies," she said, "it is I who have killed her ! But I did not know —oh, Heaven, I did not know !"

"I should say that Lady Ryvers has killed her," remarked Mrs. Carstone.

"It is too horrible !" said the heiress. "And you say there is a little child born to-day ?"

"Yes—a lovely little boy."

"Heir of Ryverswell !" said Miss Marr. "You must send for Lord Ryvers at once."

"It is useless," replied Mrs. Carstone ; "his wife has sent for him twice, and he has refused to come."

"I will not believe it !" cried the heiress. "If ever a man worshiped a woman, Lord Ryvers worshiped his wife. From the time she left home, he shut himself up, and no one has seen him since. He would have given the whole world to find her ; but she told him she would never return. He would have flown to her if he had thought she would even speak to him."

"I was with her when she wrote and posted the letters."

"Then there has been foul play," declared Miss Marr, "for I know that Lord Ryvers has never received one word from his wife since she left him. And you say she is dying?" Tears filled her eyes. "Let me see her," she said; "there is no time to be lost."

She grew pale as she entered the room and saw the beautiful colorless face of Violet and the tiny head of the nestling babe. She was so true a woman that at the sight tears filled her eyes. With gentle step she went up to the young wife and knelt down by the bedside.

"Violet," she said, gently, "do you know me? I am Gwendoline Marr."

There was a faint stir of the white eyelids. It seemed that by a desperate effort she was trying to bring herself back to life.

"She wants to speak to me," said the heiress, piteously
"Can you do nothing for her?"

The doctor came forward with a spoonful of strong cordial. Then the white eyelids opened.

"You sent for me, Violet. What can I do for you?"

"I want to give you this," she said, opening her arms that her friend might see her little child. "You are one of the noblest women in the world. Will you take him for me?" Then with one white weak hand she drew the dark, beautiful face down to her own. "You know my story," she whispered, faintly; "you know who I am. It seems to me almost that I have come back from the dead to see you. You know now that I am Randolph's wife."

"Yes; I know. Will you forgive me all the pain I have caused you? If I had known that you were Randolph's wife, I should never have spoken of him."

"I know; but you love him still?"

"I shall love him forever," was the low reply.

"And you will marry him after I am dead? Every one will forget me, and you will be happy together. I give you my little son—he will be Randolph's heir; you will love him and cherish him and care for him as if he were your own?"

"I promise," answered Miss Marr.

"How strange," said Violet, "that you should have both my husband and my son! You will love him? Do not tell him about me; let him think you are his mother. And tell

Randolph I should like to be laid to rest in the old church-yard at St. Byno's. Mine has been a short, troubled life."

"Violet," said her friend, "would you not like to see your husband?"

"He would not come to me. I sent to him twice; he would not come."

"I am sure he would come to see you and his little son if he knew. Would you like to see him?"

Oh, the rapture of love and of longing in the pale face!

"I believe," she whispered, faintly, "that if I saw him I should not die. I should live in spite of myself."

"Then you shall see him," her friend declared. "I will go and bring him to you. Doctor," she said, hastily, "I am sure that Lady Ryvers is better; give me just one gleam of hope." The doctor looked up when he heard the rank and name of his patient. "Give me one gleam of hope," she repeated.

"The best that I can say is that Lady Ryvers is no worse, and that every hour she lives adds to her chance of living," he answered, gravely.

Miss Marr bent over the pale face.

"Violet," she said, "try to live. Try to think that Randolph is coming, and wants to see you."

"Randolph will marry you; you are best suited for him; they all love you. I am content to die. Oh, dear friend, love my son!"

And then the pallor deepened, the white eyelids fell.

"Is she dead?" cried the heiress, in great alarm.

"No, she is only exhausted," replied the doctor.

Then, kissing the cold brow, Miss Marr stole softly out of the sick-room, and, hastening at once to the telegraph-office, dispatched the following message:

"From Miss Marr, railway-station, Weston-on-Sea, Kent, to Lord Ryvers, Alton House, Mayfair, London—Come here at once; your wife, Violet, is dying and wishes to see you. I will be at the station to meet you."

What wonder, consternation, and bewilderment that telegram caused Lord Ryvers! That Violet, his beautiful, willful young wife, should be dying seemed to him impossible. And why should Miss Marr be with her? Violet was dying—Violet, whom he had found in the old woods of St. Byno's—Violet, for whom he had given up the whole world, who had been so brightly happy with him, who had

overwhelmed him with bitter reproaches and left him! Violet was dying; and Miss Marr, the beautiful woman whom every one had wished him to marry, was with her!

Weston-on-Sea was not very far. He had reached the railway-station and stood with Miss Marr's hand fast clasped in his before he realized what had happened and where he was.

CHAPTER LVII.

As they drove hurriedly from the railway-station to the house, Miss Marr told Lord Ryvers all that had happened.

"And Violet was with you," he cried—"really and truly with you? How strange! It must have been the very hand of Heaven."

"I believe it was," said Miss Marr, quietly.

And then she told him of the birth of his little son. He was astonished and bewildered. All he could say was:

"My poor Violet! Pray Heaven that we may find her living! If I can but look in her face once more and tell her how much I love her."

She was living, and her life hung upon a thread. The question was whether his sudden appearance would snap that thread.

"She told me she should live if she saw you, and I believe it," said Miss Marr.

There was another surprise for Lord Ryvers when he saw Mrs. Carstone and heard her story, how she had helped and befriended his hapless young wife.

"But you," he said, reproachfully—"you should have sent to me. You knew how well I loved her."

But Mrs. Carstone had her own defense. Of what use was it for her to interfere when he had sent no answer to his wife's urgent prayer? Then he heard the story of the letters, and for the first time it struck him how negligent he had been, that he ought to have taken precautions. But he had never thought that Violet would write. The letters must have gone to Ryverswell and fallen into his mother's hands. He told himself that if his wife died his mother would be the cause.

With quiet tread he entered the sick-room. Death was not present, yet seemed very near. The beautiful face had

grown even more colorless, the nerveless arms had almost relaxed their hold.

"Violet," says Miss Marr, bending over her, "can you hear me?"

But there was no answer. Again she spoke, but it was with the same result.

"I am afraid we are too late," she said. "Speak to her yourself."

Then he came forward and looked upon her, his wife, his darling, his only love, lying there so still and pale, with their little son in her arms. He did not look at the child, his eyes were riveted on her face. This was his Violet, whom he had found where "June's palace was paved with gold." A bitter cry, the cry of a strong man in despair, came from his lips as he fell upon his knees by her side.

At the sound Violet opened her eyes. It had pierced her heart, and stirred what little life was there.

"Violet," he cried—"oh, my darling, speak to me, look at me!"

A faint color rushed to her face, a faint light came into the shadowed eyes, the white lips smiled.

"Violet, my darling, my dear wife!" he cried. "Oh, thank Heaven that I see those dear eyes once again! Violet, say 'Welcome!'"

"Welcome!" she responded, faintly.

And then he heard her whisper something about the baby. He stooped and kissed the tiny face.

"My little son!" he said. "May Heaven bless and keep my little son! Violet, you must get better. You must live for my sake."

She drew his head down to her face and whispered in his ear:

"It will be better, much better for me to die; then you can marry Miss Marr, and you will all be happy. I should be only in the way, and she will be kind to my baby."

"If you die, Violet, I shall die," he said. "There will be neither love nor marriage for me. I want not Miss Marr, or another, but you, sweet, only you. Live for me, Violet!"

"You did not come when I sent," she whispered.

"I never received the letters; I never heard of them until to-day."

And then it seemed to her as though the sting of death had been removed.

"I should have come at once. I should not have delayed one moment," he said. "Oh, Violet, live for me!"

Her eyes closed, and her head drooped upon his breast; she fell into a deep, sweet slumber, and those round her watched in anxious expectation. Over the face of the doctor came an expression of relief; Mrs. Carstone breathed more freely.

"If Lady Ryvers should recover," she said to Miss Marr, "it is you who will have saved her life by bringing her husband to her."

Once the little child stirred; and the nurse took it away; but Violet still slept.

"It is almost miraculous," said the doctor; "I believe she will live."

How long she lay in that deep, dreamless sleep, her husband's arm round her, her head pillow'd on his breast; Violet never knew. When at last she woke, it was to find his handsome face bent over her with undying love shining in his eyes.

Still for many hours her life hung upon a thread, a thread so slight that the least jar might have snapped it, and during that time Randolph never left her, neither did Miss Marr. Inch by inch they helped to fight the grim battle for her. It seemed as though they wrestled with Death and disputed his ground. Then came faint flashes of life, a smile, a gleam of light in the eyes, a whispered word, a request for the baby. Gradually the deathlike languor left the young mother, and life came back. Through it all she clung to Randolph. If he were absent a short time, she relapsed; she seemed to live only in his presence.

At last came the day when the doctor declared that there was no more danger, and that with good nursing his patient would soon recover.

Lord Ryvers was at a loss how to express his gratitude to Mrs. Carstone.

"You will be the dearest friend that my wife and I have," he said to her.

As for the heiress, neither he nor Violet tried to thank her. She was to them simply the noblest woman in the world, more angel than woman. When all danger was

past, and a faint rose-bloom returned to the face of Lady Ryvers, Miss Marr left them. She had done all she could, and no one but herself knew what it had cost her.

The day came when the windows were opened wide, the lace-curtains drawn back, and the sea-breeze allowed to come in and kiss the beautiful face from which all pride and willfulness had died, leaving nothing but sweetness in their place. And on that day husband and wife had a long conversation together. Never a shadow came between them in after-life, for they told on that morning the deepest secrets of their heart to each other. Then Lord Ryvers heard for the first time how his mother had persecuted Violet, how she had insinuated that he had connived at her attempts to invalidate the marriage. Violet kept nothing from him, and he no longer wondered that his fair young wife left him.

There were no secrets after that; but there came a vexed question. The doctor said that Lady Ryvers was able to travel, and would be the better for change of air. Lord Ryvers longed to take the little heir home; he longed for the people to cheer at the sight of the heir of Ryversdale; but, when he mentioned this to Violet, he saw her face change.

"Randolph," she said, "I registered a vow that I would never go back to Ryverswell unless your mother asked me."

"Will you go if she does ask you?" he said. "Will you go and forget all that has passed there, and begin a new life that shall have no cloud?"

"Begin," she supplemented, with a smile, "to wear orange-blossoms that have no thorns? Oh, Randolph, how little I dreamed how sharp those thorns could be!"

"There shall never be another," he said. "Violet, if my mother and sisters come to you, and ask you to go Ryverswell, will you go?"

"Yes," she said; and he sealed the promise with a kiss.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE dowager Lady Ryvers was not the happiest of women. Estranged from the son she loved, with a disagreeable consciousness of having behaved cruelly and unjustly to his wife, she found little pleasure in her life. Miss Marr had been to see her, but the visit had not been of the most pleasant kind. She had done her best to heal

all differences between mother and son ; but Lord Ryvers had declined to visit Athelstone, and had refused all overtures. Monica was unhappy, was losing her good looks and spirits—in fact, life was going wrong with the dowager altogether.

She knew that in destroying Violet's letters she had done a wicked and cowardly deed. Her conscience reproached her with it continually. It was treachery for which there was no pardon ; and the fear of what her son would say, should he ever know it, preyed so much on her mind that Lady Ryvers felt positively ill.

Great were her surprise and dismay when, one day, on taking up the *Morning Post*, she found amongst the "Births" the following announcement—

"On Tuesday, May 3d, at Weston-on-Sea, Lady Ryvers, of a son."

So this was why Violet had written so urgently, this was why she had begged of her husband to go to see her ! The dowager was disarmed. The last glimmer of hope died in her heart when she read this. If ever there had been a chance of setting aside the marriage or of finally parting husband and wife, she felt that there was none now. In spite of all her coldness, pride, and worldliness, something warmed her heart as she thought of the little heir of Ryverswell.

She called Monica, and showed her the paragraph.

"Oh, mamma," cried the girl, "you must be friends with Violet now ! She is a person of double importance ! Poor sweet Violet ! I am so heartily glad ! "

And, oddly enough, her mother was not angry with her. The dowager wondered, with some anxiety, whether she should hear any further news ; but none came until the beginning of June, when Randolph suddenly appeared. He had followed her into the garden, and stood looking at her over the rose-trees.

"I want you, mother," he said. "Can you find a few minutes for me ? I have something very particular to say."

She came from amongst the roses, looking very stately, very handsome, proud, and pale. He offered her his arm, and led her to the pretty trellised summer-house, then placed her on the cushioned seat, and, with his arms folded, stood looking at her.

"Mother," he said at last, "my wife Violet has been very near death. If she had died, you would have been the cause."

The proud face paled a little!

"You would have been the cause," he repeated. "Mother, why did you destroy the letters Violet sent to me?"

"How do you know that I destroyed them?" she asked.

"My own sure instinct tells me so," he replied. "You do not deny it."

"I do not," said Lady Ryvers proudly.

"Why did you do it?" he asked.

"It was the foolish act of a desperate woman," she said. "I never wished you to meet her again; she had brought sorrow enough into our lives."

"It was a treacherous deed," he rejoined.

"I considered the end justified the means," she declared; and for some minutes there was silence between them.

"Mother," he said gently, bending his handsome young head over her, "we are neither of us happy while we are estranged. I have come to make peace. I will forgive and forget all that has passed, if you will come back with me to Weston-on-Sea and ask Violet to go home to Ryverswell. She will never go without. She has nearly lost her life through you. To make amends for that, will you, as no else can, reinstate her and give her a hearty welcome to Ryverswell? Oh, mother, do this for my little son's sake! Your heart will relent to the mother when you see the child."

There was a short sharp struggle in the dowager's proud heart before she answered. Then she put her arms around her son's neck, and said—

"I will go."

On the evening of that same day Violet sat watching the sun set over the sea, when her husband's mother entered the room, and, going up to her, kissed the beautiful face.

"Violet," she said, "I have come to make friends. For baby's sake forgive me all my unkindness; forgive me, dear, and let us bury the past."

But it was not for "baby's sake" that she kissed the sweet face so often and listened so patiently while Violet

told her story, it was not for "baby's sake" that she grew fond of the girl she had persecuted and hated; it was for her own. She made her submission with queenly grace. She asked Violet to return to Ryverswell, and let the past be forgotten.

Before they had been three days together, Violet took heart of grace.

"Lady Ryvers," she said, "I want to ask a great favor of you; so great a favor is it that, if you grant it, not only will the past be obliterated from my mind, but I shall be so grateful for it that the whole devotion of my life will never repay you."

"I should hardly have thought that it was in my power to grant you a favor," replied the dowager. "What is it, Violet?"

"Let Monica marry Paul Caerlyon," she said boldly.

The dowager looked as though the sky had fallen at her feet. Then Violet told Monica's love-story. She shed many tears over it, and at last, slowly, reluctantly, but in the end graciously, the dowager yielded; and Monica's joy was as great as her sorrow had been.

Paul was invited to Ryverswell; and nothing would please Lord Ryvers until the family from Ingleshaw had been asked too; and then followed such a triumphal home-coming as has seldom been witnessed. How the people cheered when they saw the little heir and his beautiful young mother! How they talked afterward of "the string of carriages!" Lord and Lady Ryvers were in the first, with the dowager and Monica. Then came the Earl and Countess of Lester; then Mr. and Mrs. Carstone. Paul Caerlyon and Oscar Carstone rode. There was such cheering and feasting, such merriment and revelry, that the day is still spoken of as one to be remembered.

So long as they lived, Lord Ryvers did everything in his power to show his gratitude to the millionaire and his wife. He introduced them everywhere, and he spoke so highly of them that every one was anxious to know them; and in that way he amply repaid his obligations to them. Oscar made a grand match—he married the daughter of an impoverished earl, of whom his parents stood greatly in awe during the remainder of their lives.

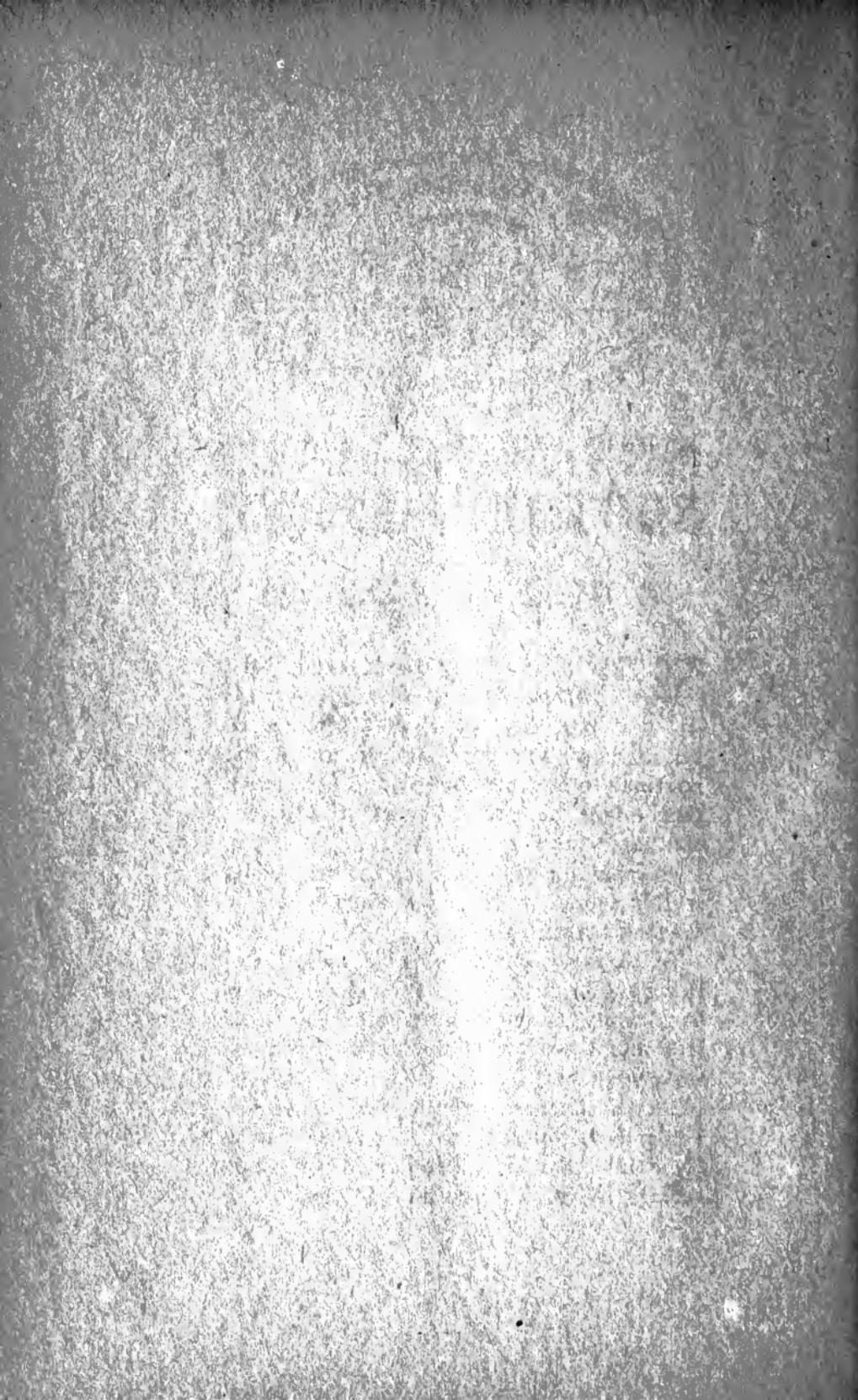
Violet, Lady Ryvers, took courage and wrote to her

Aunt Alice, telling her of the birth of her little son; but Miss Atherton was Spartan to the last. She never answered the letter, and remains to this day quite indifferent to the fact that her niece is one of the most beautiful, most popular and admired women in England, admired all the more for the little bursts of radicalism in which she indulges. Since she is the mother of the future Lord of Ryverswell, she cannot consistently dislike the aristocracy.

Beautiful Violet had found amid her orange-blossoms many thorns. She has none now; the crown of perfect wifehood, perfect motherhood, sits on her queenly head. All the romance of her youth goes with her through life, and she never tires of telling her children how her husband wooed her in disguise and married her for love.

There was just one shadow to the sunny picture. Miss Marr went away, passed out of their lives. It was better for all three, she said, that they should not meet. She made her home in Italy; but her home was desolate, just as her heart was empty, because she loved the wrong man.

Violet, Lady Ryvers, laughs gayly now as she says, "Better a wreath of orange-blossoms with hidden thorns than no orange-blossoms at all!"





MRS. WINSLOW'S SOOTHING SYRUP

A Word to Mothers

WHILE the advertisements of Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup state precisely what the experienced nurse knew the syrup had done and would continue to do for infants, there is as much that might be said of what it does for mothers.

In allaying the pain of infants while teething, it insures to mothers peaceful days and restful nights.

In relieving infants of wind colic it relieves mothers of one of their main causes for anxiety, and as a remedy for diarrhoea it would seem to be the antidote for all maternal fears.

Hence mothers can enjoy the home circle and the outside world as well while their infants thrive through the medium of Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup.

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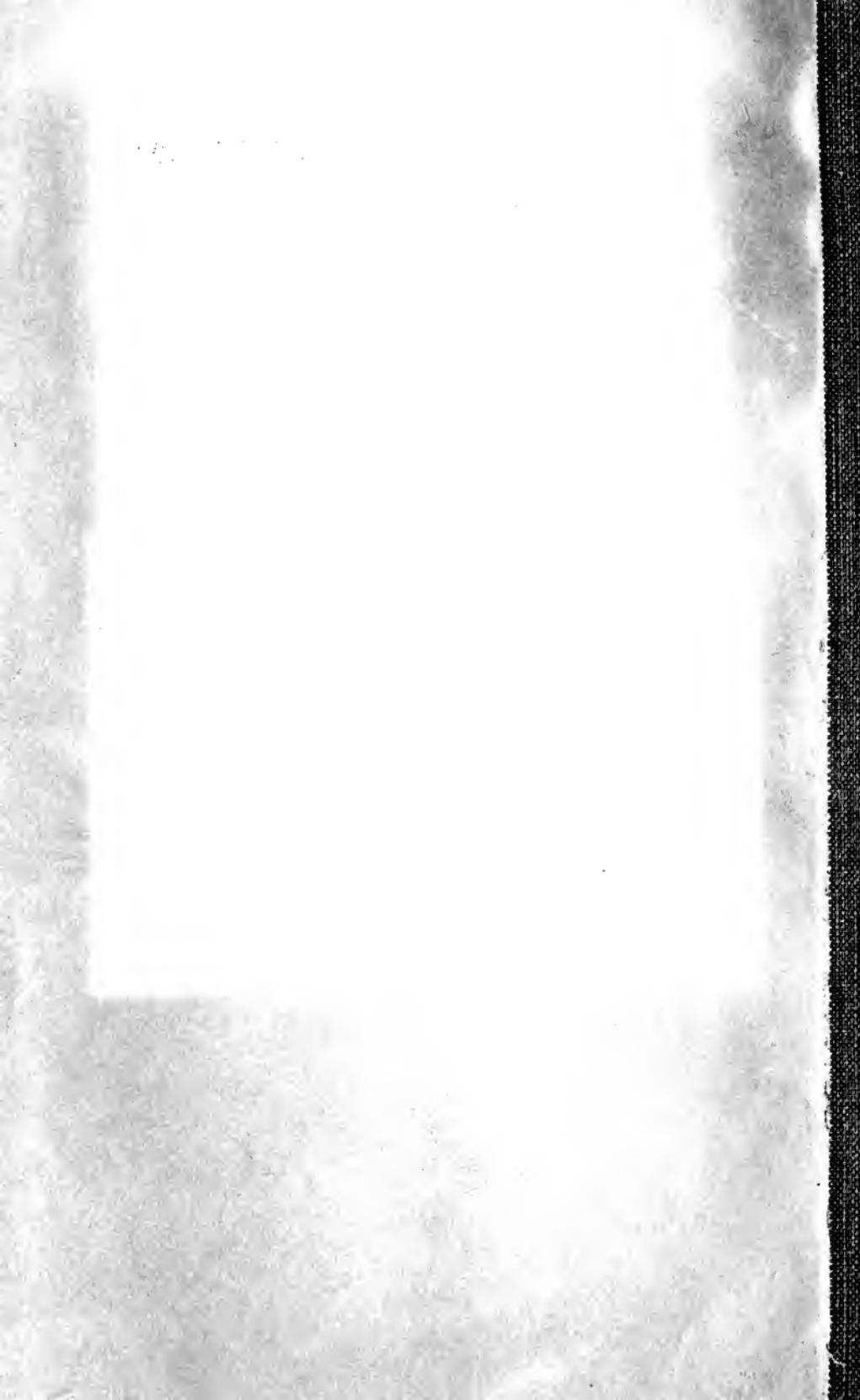
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